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## PHIL FODEN

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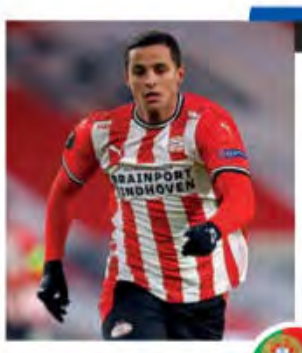

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# In Pictures

**The global game caught on camera**

Germany...players from the German national team protest against Qatar's human rights record

Serbia...Portugal forward Cristiano Ronaldo storms off the pitch after being denied a last-gasp winner against Serbia in a 2022 World Cup qualifier

England...Wilfried Zaha becomes the first Premier League player this season to stand instead of taking a knee before kick-off

Brazil...Palmeiras players celebrate winning the 2020 Copa do Brazil versus Gremio in Sao Paulo

Scotland...Rangers fans gather at Ibrox Stadium to celebrate the club winning the Scottish Premiership for the first time in ten years

Sweden...Zlatan Ibrahimovic marks his international comeback by setting up the winner versus Georgia in a 2022 World Cup qualifier

Spain...Norway players pose with T-shirts reading: "Human rights, on and off the pitch. Norway, Germany, next?" in support of migrant workers building World Cup venues in Qatar

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# FROM THE ASSISTANT EDITOR

"He has everything to become one of the best players…Phil is the most, most, most talented player I have ever seen in my career as a manager."

For a man that has coached some of the world's finest players, Pep Guardiola's praise of Phil Foden is not to be taken lightly. The former Barcelona coach has heaped it on fairly regularly since arriving in Manchester, but it has taken until this season for him to truly place his trust in the young Mancunian.

Foden's time has arrived. After his devastating display at Anfield back in February, *World Soccer* immediately set Ryan Baldi the task of delving into the youngster's past, to tell the story of how he became one of the most highly-regarded young players in world football (page 28).

Foden also leads the way in our rundown of the 25 players to watch at the rapidly-approaching European Championship. As always, we've tried to pick out the less obvious candidates: those who've excelled under the radar, young players bidding to make a name for themselves, or those – like Foden – for whom the year-long delay to the tournament has helped propel them from outsiders to potential stars for their team.

**Phil Foden's time has arrived**

Finally, congratulations are in order for the national teams of the Comoros and Gambia, who have both qualified for next year's Africa Cup of Nations for the first time in their history (page 90). The joyous scenes of celebration that followed both sides' successes provided a reminder that, in spite of its faults, international football is still capable of providing some of the sport's most heart-warming moments.

**Jamie Evans, Assistant Editor**

Bravery…Andy Woodward was the first former player to speak out in 2016

ENGLAND

## Sheldon report delivers verdict into child abuse scandal

The report into football's child sex abuse scandal found that there were "significant institutional failings" by the FA in dealing with the accusations and that they "did not do enough to keep children safe".

"The FA acted far too slowly to introduce appropriate and sufficient child protection measures, and to ensure that safeguarding was taken sufficiently seriously by those involved in the game," said the 710-page Sheldon report, which focused on abuse of children between 1970 and 2005.

In response, FA chief executive Mark Bullingham apologised by addressing the victims directly, saying: "No child should ever have experienced the abuse you did. What you went through was horrific and it is deeply upsetting that more was not done by the game at the time, to give you the protection you deserved."

The report found the FA culpable of multiple charges, including the failure to ban two of the most notorious abusers, Barry Bennell and Bob Higgins. In 2016,

"Let's be clear, it's disparaging. There's an element of xenophobia about it…it's clear that football is resisting this appointment"

**Gary Neville condemns criticism of newly-appointed PFA chief executive, Maheta Molango**

ex-Crewe Alexandra player Andy Woodward opened up to *The Guardian* about the abuse that he suffered at the hands of Bennell, which led to several other players coming forward and to the FA commissioning the report.

A three-part BBC documentary, *Football's Darkest Secret*, began in March, featuring several of the survivors telling their stories.

UEFA

## Life after COVID: FFP rules reviewed

UEFA's financial fair play regulations are set to undergo significant changes in light of the economic problems caused by the pandemic.

"COVID-19 has generated a revenue crisis and had a big impact on the liquidity of clubs," said Andrea Traverso, director of research and financial stability for UEFA. "This is a crisis which is very different from anything we have had to tackle before. In such a situation obviously clubs are struggling; they have difficulties in complying with their obligations."

As reported in *The Guardian*, Traverso explained that the current "break-even" rule looks back over a club's finances to form an assessment, but "the pandemic represents such an abrupt change that looking to the past is becoming purposeless."

"Maybe the rules should have a stronger focus on the present and the future, and should definitely have stronger focus on the challenges of high levels of wages and the transfer market."

The future of FFP was thrown into doubt after CAS overthrew a Champions League ban for Manchester City last year, but UEFA have stood by the principle of the rules. Traverso added: "Those that are saying that the rules will be abandoned or relaxed are just speculating. Rules can be different, sure, but this does not necessarily mean that the rules will be less stringent."

**Andrea Traverso…UEFA's director of research and financial stability will lead the FFP assessment**

# HEROES & VILLAINS

**500 club…Luis Suarez**

### LUIS SUAREZ

To celebrate the Uruguayan striker's 500th career goal, his sponsors Puma donated 500 footballs to youth teams in the cities he has played in at club level, including Amsterdam, Liverpool and Barcelona. The news came just weeks after the Barca forward established Deportivo LS, a new team that will play in Uruguay's University League, with the goal of eventually turning professional.

### LIVERPOOL

No, not them, the other ones: Liverpool FC of Montevideo. For the first time in their 106-year history, the "Black and Blues" have been crowned champions of Uruguay, sealing the Clausura title after losing just one game. Striker Ignacio Ramirez was the star, topping the league's scoring charts with 13 goals.

### BONO

After earning cult-hero status in Andalusia last season, thanks to his goalkeeping heroics in helping Sevilla win a record sixth Europa League crown, Moroccan goalkeeper Bono is more well-known for keeping goals out. But in March he was a hero at the other end after scoring a stoppage-time equaliser against Real Valladolid. In doing so, he became the first goalkeeper to score for the club in La Liga.

### ALPHONSO DAVIES

The Bayern Munich and Canada star recently became the first footballer to be named an ambassador for the United Nations' refugee charity UNHCR. "I'm honoured to become a Goodwill Ambassador for UNHCR," said Davies, a former refugee himself. "I have come a long way from the refugee camp where I was born and worked hard to get where I am today. But I'll never forget where I started."

### RIO FERDINAND

Ferdinand's suggestion that Newcastle fans who criticise Mike Ashley should "round your money up and take over the club" was not only tone-deaf, it was also completely illogical. Can fans only criticise owners if they have the wealth to buy the team? Magpies supporters pointed out that Ferdinand's opinion may be skewed by the fact that his clothing line is sold on Ashley's Sports Direct website.

### NATIONAL LEAGUE BOARD

The organisers of England's fifth and sixth tiers handed out several fines to clubs for failing to fulfil fixtures, in spite of the fact that both the National League North and South were declared null and void in February. When government grants dried up earlier in the year, several teams stopped playing while awaiting the league's verdict. Many clubs are now considering a vote of no confidence against the board.

### YANN SONGO'O

The Morecambe defensive midfielder was handed a six-game ban from the Football League for allegedly using a homophobic slur in a League Two clash with Tranmere. "I'm totally against any form of discrimination and I know what I said was totally unacceptable, I can only apologise and ask for forgiveness to anyone I offended," he said later.

### SEPP BLATTER

The former FIFA president's ban from football has been extended by six years and eight months after an investigation found evidence of an "undue economic benefit" accepted by Blatter during his reign. The 85-year-old is already banned until October, at which point the additional punishment will begin.

**Sepp Blatter…disgraced**

"I am still very curious about the offside rule because I am convinced that it is not a good rule…I am convinced football would be better without it"

**Netherlands legend Marco van Basten**

## *Ibrahima KONATE*

*(RB Leipzig)*

While Bayern-bound Dayot Upamecano has grabbed plenty of headlines as one of the most wanted players in Europe, his fellow Frenchman in RB Leipzig's defence is just as highly rated. That's why Liverpool have reportedly agreed to pay his €40 million release clause ahead of the summer's transfer window.

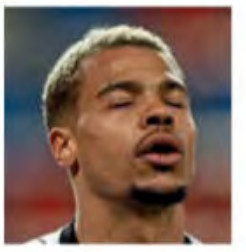
Konate, who turns 22 in May, joined Leipzig from Sochaux in 2017 and has played over 60 Bundesliga games for the German side. In the mould of many modern centre-backs, he combines impressive athleticism with strong defensive attributes, while also being extremely comfortable in possession. In March he started alongside Sevilla's Jules Kounde for France in the U21 Euros, yet he is also eligible to play for Mali.

If a move to Anfield does fall through, a move elsewhere is still highly likely with a string of suitors lining up to sign him.

**CHRISTOS TZOLIS**
(PAOK)
The 19-year-old has double figures for goals and assists in all competitions this season – one of the first teenagers in Europe to hit that milestone.

**DARIO ESSUGO**
(Sporting)
The midfielder broke down in tears on the pitch after becoming Sporting's youngest-ever player, aged 16 years and five days, just days after signing his first professional contract.

**BEN PUGH**
(Cayman Islands)
The former Ipswich Town coach got his first taste of World Cup football in charge of the Cayman Islands in March, leading the tiny Caribbean nation in the CONCACAF qualifiers.



**LUKAS NMECHA**
(Anderlecht)
The striker scored eight goals in 31 appearances for England's youth teams; since switching to Germany U21s, he has beaten that tally in just 15 caps.

**XAVI**
(Al Sadd)
Speculation about the Spanish coach returning to Barcelona will increase after the 41-year-old guided his side to the Qatar Stars League, his first league title as a manager.

**CHE ADAMS**
(Southampton)
The Leicester-born striker is a strong contender for Scotland's Euro 2020 squad, after formally declaring for the country of one of his grandparents and making his debut v Austria.

# Jim HOLDEN

AT THE HEART OF THE GAME

## Football should come home – to Uruguay

Sometimes in life the heart should rule the head. So yes, it may be a triumph of emotion over logic, but the most appropriate choice of venue for the 2030 World Cup, its centenary year, is one that features a final in Montevideo.

This is where it all started, when Uruguay beat Argentina 4-2 at the Estadio Centenario to lift the first-ever trophy. How can returning full circle not be the preferred option for anyone who values history and tradition?

The logistics of future 48-team World Cups mean that all the potential 2030 bids will involve several nations co-hosting the event. Uruguay's application will be jointly made with Argentina, Chile and Paraguay – and it will be the clear favourite once FIFA's formal process begins early next year.

Nobody doubts the passion for football in these neighbouring nations. The matches will have big crowds and an exhilarating sporting atmosphere. It could be a magical party. But, having said all that, the bidding process must not turn into a sentimental walkover.

The application must be based on sound finance, and prove that it has the requisite stadia, infrastructure and capacity to accommodate thousands of fans at least as well as its rivals.

A joint Spain/Portugal campaign would have strong credentials, and perhaps even more power if the Iberians join forces with Morocco, who could alternatively form a North African bid with Algeria, Tunisia and Egypt.

**Estadio Centenario... Uruguay's national stadium hosted the first-ever World Cup final back in 1930**

The latest possible entry is a World Cup staged in collaboration between England, Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. It will generate much media clamour, but how realistic is it?

We can certainly ignore the risible comments of UK prime minister Boris Johnson about "bringing football home". That is a slogan out of time, used only in a cheap attempt to gain political capital.

For the British Isles to host, they will have to win two bidding competitions: first to become the lone European candidate selected by UEFA, who only want one horse in the race.

> Playing the history card as the "the home of football" is likely to be counter-productive for the centenary World Cup, when England and the other home nations snubbed the fledgling tournament

AFCON 2021 hosts Cameroon have also expressed an interest, while Peru, Colombia and Ecuador could team up to offer a South American alternative.

A combined bid from Greece, Serbia, Bulgaria and Romania looks less attractive, but would represent a bold step into the unknown.

The anti-European emotions stirred by Brexit will not help the British cause. Playing the history card as the "the home of football" is also likely to be counter-productive for the centenary World Cup, given that England and the other home nations snubbed the fledgling tournament.

The only path to success for Britain is to highlight the positives of its case – the recent expertise of staging major events like the 2012 London Olympics, the existence already of the required number of 50,000-plus all-seater stadia, and that high tourist numbers would be easily accommodated. The best card of all to play is the guarantee of cash profit that will boost FIFA's bank balance to provide financial help across the continents.

What they should not talk about is the idea of an exceptional love for football. Intense passion and enthusiastic knowledge is worldwide.

Technical excellence is the one aspect that could make the difference for a British bid; it might get UEFA backing if it can be demonstrated to be superior to that of Spain/Portugal.

From there, it would have to do the same with FIFA – and maybe a new era of improved transparency in decision-making could also have an impact by selection time in 2024.

That is a minefield of "coulds", "mights" and "maybes". Even then, a British bid would still face the desire of so many people for a World Cup in 2030 back where it all began, with a final in Montevideo. The magic of that appears to have an irresistible allure.

# Keir RADNEDGE

THE INSIDER

## The rise and fall of *Der Kaiser*

This is a cautionary tale about Franz Beckenbauer and about why retired superstars should think long and hard before staking their status and image on power games off the pitch.

In some ways Beckenbauer shares a legacy with the late Diego Maradona. First viewing suggests few points of connection. They were superstars in different, succeeding eras and their only competitive collisions were the 1986 and 1990 World Cup finals. Maradona was captain of Argentina, Beckenbauer coach of West Germany.

Yet both present the confusion of a great playing legacy entangled with a subsequent life less than bright.

Throughout most of the 20th century, footballers were single-dimension individuals who morphed either into management or vanished altogether once their playing days were done. Our media revolution has changed that: ex-players may now maintain a public profile through broadcasting, while a tiny handful have risked image and status in the snake pit of sports politics.

Here the paths of Beckenbauer and Maradona diverged. Maradona continued, until his sad recent death, to garner headlines more via a chaotic personal life than erratic dabbles in management. As for Beckenbauer, his reputation has been tarnished by flying too close to FIFA's corrupt Blatter-era and its World Cup bidding scandals.

**World Cup winner... Beckenbauer gets his hands on the World Cup trophy in 1974**

Beckenbauer's fall from grace may appear recent, yet the clean, classy image of a great player turned great ambassador had been compromised, beyond public sight, for far longer.

He glided into the collective consciousness of international football at the 1966 World Cup, stepping gazelle-like over despairing tackles to score two of West Germany's goals in their opening 5-1 win over Switzerland. Coming six months after Beckenbauer's debut, this was the startling start of a new era.

West Germany's unified Bundesliga, bringing full-time professionalism in its wake, had begun three years earlier. Beckenbauer's Bayern Munich were not even among the original 16 clubs and had to earn promotion in 1965.

> As for Beckenbauer, his reputation has been tarnished by flying too close to FIFA's corrupt Blatter-era and its World Cup bidding scandals

Over the next decade Bayern, inspired by the creative brilliance of Beckenbauer and the goals of Gerd Muller, swept up four league titles, four cups, three European Champions Cups in succession, one Cup Winners' Cup and one World Club Cup.

West Germany's national team, with the travelling room-mates at their heart, won the 1974 World Cup, were runners-up in 1966 and third in 1970, and carried off the Euros in 1972. By then Beckenbauer had eased back from midfield to a commanding role as a roving, scheming sweeper.

The oft-used term "*libero*" was misleading. In Italy the "free man" had been the ultra-defensive *catenaccio*, patrolling warily and ruthlessly behind all his team-mates, goalkeeper apart.

Beckenbauer's interpretation was a revolution. His influence was felt not only on the pitch but off it. In the 1974 World Cup it was his insistence on changes after the 1-0 defeat to East Germany – including dropping Bayern team-mate Uli Hoeness – that sparked an ultimately triumphant revival.

His influence at Bayern was unique because Robert Schwan, his own personal manager, was also Bayern general manager. It was a conflict of interest never challenged because results were all-important.

Beckenbauer's perks and private life were hidden from the headlines. Of course, it helped that he enjoyed

the protection of a regular column in *Bild Zeitung*, which was only too happy to maintain exclusive access to the national team captain.

The nation was later shocked by his embrace of a big contract to play alongside Pele at New York Cosmos, but welcomed him back three years later for one last hurrah with Hamburg. The Midas touch never deserted him: three NASL titles with Cosmos and a last Bundesliga with Hamburg.

Then it was home to retirement – but never out of the limelight.

Beckenbauer's criticism of national coach Jupp Derwall prompted the DFB to say: "If you can do better, do it." So he did: runners-up at World Cup 1986 and winners in 1990; the first man to win the ultimate prize as captain and then coach.

Then came a first hint that perhaps Beckenbauer was not infallible. He accepted the blandishments of Bernard Tapie, the French populist businessman-turned-politician to become coach of Marseille. He failed to do his homework either on the club set-up or on Tapie. The team stumbled. Tapie turned to the veteran Belgian, Raymond Goethals, to turn results around. Beckenbauer remained on the payroll but only until the summer of 1991 when Tapie's match-fixing propensities exploded on the game.

Somehow Beckenbauer escaped being tainted by the French connection. He returned home to become president of Bayern, then appointed himself coach to guide them to the league title in 1994 and the UEFA Cup in 1996. Two more years saw him appointed vice-president of the DFB before joining the all-powerful executive committees of UEFA and FIFA.

Now he was tipped for football's top job – president of FIFA. But instead he preferred to stay home and enhance his image further by heading up Germany's successful bid to stage the 2006 World Cup. Family and friends urged him to quit while he was ahead; but in vain.

December 2, 2010, was the day it all began to go wrong. Beckenbauer's FIFA voting role entangled him in the Russia and Qatar World Cup awards. Six months later he quit as lurid tales circulated around the World Cup votes.

FIFA appointed American attorney Michael Garcia to investigate. He expanded his purview to include the 2006 award to Germany after the discovery that a payment of $250,000 was made by marketing partner ISL to an unidentified individual one day before Germany landed the finals.

Beckenbauer refused to answer Garcia's questions, was banned from football for 90 days and had to stay away from World Cup 2014. But worse was to come. In October 2015 he found himself at the centre of a bid bribes scandal.

Magazine *Der Spiegel* revealed that the German 2006 bidding committee set up a slush fund financed to the tune of 10.3m Swiss Francs by Robert Louis-Dreyfus who was then chief executive of long-time FIFA, German federation and Bayern sponsor Adidas. The cash, according to *Der Spiegel*, "was used to secure the four votes belonging to Asian representatives on the FIFA executive committee...in casting their ballots for the tournament to be awarded to Germany."

All this led to Beckenbauer and three DFB colleagues being subjected to both a FIFA ethics inquiry and a Swiss criminal investigation. The trial collapsed last spring but Beckenbauer was never charged on grounds of ill health. He subsequently retreated from public life, quit his TV pundit role and cancelled his 34-year column with *Bild*.

So, as the shadows of retirement enfold him, which Franz Beckenbauer will the game remember: the incomparable player or the injudicious director?

Here the Maradona comparison comes in handy. For all the mangled state of his private life, the images of Maradona which shine the brightest remain those of the ball-juggling kid, the inspirational displays for Napoli and the wondergoal against England in 1986. All etched into the collective memory of not only football fans but a wider world.

Similarly for Beckenbauer: in the film vaults of sporting immortality are the fabulous images of the youngster trading steps with Bobby Charlton in 1966, defying a dislocated shoulder in the 1970 semi-final thriller against Italy, the first club captain to raise the European Cup three years in a row and *Der Kaiser* who hoisted the World Cup in 1974.

Let's face it, dull old photographs of a committee room simply cannot compare.

**Tainted...Beckenbauer's reputation has been tarnished by World Cup bidding scandals**

# BOOKS THIS MONTH

**WHOSE GAME IS IT ANYWAY?**
*by Michael Calvin (Pitch Publishing, £19.99)*

Football has never seemed so distant from its fans, with many alienated by the greed and shameless at the top of the game. In Michael Calvin's latest book, the acclaimed sports writer shares the lessons of a lifetime spent observing sport across the globe. Part memoir, part manifesto, the book is a thought-provoking, deeply personal account of the role sport and particularly football plays in everyday life.

**WHEN THE SEAGULLS FOLLOW THE TRAWLER: FOOTBALL IN THE 90S**
*by Tom Whitworth (Pitch Publishing, £12.99)*

The 1990s was a golden age for football. The Premier League exploded, England hosted its first major tournament since 1966, and a raft of new stadia sprang up in the wake of the Taylor Report. In *When the Seagulls Follow the Trawler*, Tom Whitworth travels to the hotbeds of English football to meet players, managers and fans who lived through that great era.

# Jonathan WILSON

TECHNICALLY SPEAKING

## Fear of fatigue invokes memories of 2002

When football returned in much of Western Europe last May and June, the priority was clear: get it done. Get through the season in whatever form was possible, both to avert financial meltdown and to offer at least something for the public to watch. But as this season has gone on, the cycle of two games almost every week for Premier League clubs has very clearly taken its toll – and that has major implications for the Euros.

Players look tired. Game after game feels like a slog. That's reflected not only in the running stats and the number of soft tissue injuries, but also a lack of imagination; tiredness shows in the minds as well as the bodies. And then just when the season comes to an end, players will have to pick themselves up again and, two weeks after the Champions League final, go again.

There's a real danger that this summer's Euros could go the way of the 2002 World Cup, a tournament characterised by fatigue. In terms of quality it was unfortunate that the Netherlands failed to qualify and that the likes of Robert Pires, Emerson and Steven Gerrard missed the tournament through injury, while David Beckham and Zinedine Zidane were far from fully fit.

But worse was the sense that everybody was exhausted. It was the first major tournament after the expansion of the Champions League and the sense was that clubs were still catching up. But most significant of all was the fact that, to avoid the worst of the Japanese rainy season, the World Cup began two weeks earlier than usual, at the end of May, the result of which was that players arriving from Europe, having had barely any break, were desperately weary.

**Flop...holders France crashed out at the group stage in 2002**

It became a tournament full of shocks. The two overwhelming favourites, France and Argentina, went out without winning a game. Turkey and South Korea reached the semi-finals. Brazil ended up beating a weak Germany in the final. While unpredictability is usually a good thing for a tournament, in Japan and South Korea the sense was that it went too far, that what we were witnessing wasn't a couple of smaller sides over-performing, or the complacency of a couple of bigger teams, but a major structural issue. Most importantly of all, the football by and large was poor, stodgy fare served up by teams too exhausted to play to anything like their maximum.

> There's a real danger that this summer's Euros could go the way of the 2002 World Cup, a tournament characterised by fatigue

What that means is that how this summer's Euros go might depend less than usual on innate quality than on freshness. Which country has the most players who are least knackered? Who can be the equivalent of Ronaldo in 2002, who went into that World Cup fresher than almost anybody else, having missed three months of the previous season through injury?

Tactically, the tournament will probably be best suited to teams content to sit deep and play on the counter. There is no equivalent of South Korea here, no side who

**Underdogs...South Korea went all the way to the semi-finals when they co-hosted the 2002 World Cup with Japan**

has been able to suspend their league season and sequester their best players away together in a training camp.

The evidence of the league season is that nobody, not even teams who train together every day, can play with a really aggressive press this season. Manchester City's success has been rooted in the way they have successfully eased back. Attempts to impose a pressing game are extremely difficult at international level given the lack of time available to coaches and the lack of time players spend together (Chile under Marcelo Bielsa and later Jorge Sampaoli were a rare exception, largely because the squad barely changed from one get together to the next). That's also why suggestions that England should seek to play like Liverpool were never really plausible.

Who then might that help? Certainly not Germany, unless Jogi Low at last reverts to the approach that eventually brought World Cup success in 2014. Countries over-reliant on one or two key players may also struggle if the risk of injury is increased. France, England and Spain, though, all have almost an implausibly large pool to draw from, as can be seen from the strength of their Under-21 squads. In seven or eight positions, Gareth Southgate has two or three serious contenders for the role, a depth England haven't had for at least quarter of a century.

Italy, meanwhile, playing canny football under Roberto Mancini, may be the country to benefit if it does come down to a battle of who can best construct a deep-lying defensive unit while still offering sufficient threat on the break. Portugal's entire method five years ago was to dig in and wait for Cristiano Ronaldo to do something; that could work again.

This is not a tournament that can be approached like any other. International football is rarely a place to get too hung up on aesthetics, but this summer especially, a functional approach is likely to be the only realistic option.

## REPORTS WE COULDN'T MAKE UP

Career change... Lichtsteiner

### 1 TIME FOR A CHANGE

While most footballers consider a career in coaching or the media after retiring, former Juventus, Arsenal and Switzerland defender Stephan Lichtsteiner has something else in mind. "I want to do something productive," the 37-year-old told *Reuters*, after beginning a six-month internship with Swiss watchmakers Maurice de Mauriac. "I see some similarities to football. In football if not all the team is perfect you will not win. It's the same with a watch, if everything is not perfectly in place the watch is not going to work." The plan is for Lichtsteiner to make a watch and sell it for charity at the end of his internship.

### 2 LIMA LET OFF

Alianza Lima's relegation in 2020 sent shockwaves throughout Peruvian football. Only one club, their fierce rivals Universitario, have won more league titles, and the idea of a league campaign without them seemed inconceivable. Well, Alianza agreed, and have been appealing against their relegation ever since. Their argument was that Carlos Stein, who finished just outside the bottom three, should have been docked points for failing to pay players on time. Alianza eventually turned to CAS, who ruled in their favour, after the 2021 season had already begun. Carlos Stein's only match was subsequently wiped from the record books.

### 3 IN YOUR FACE

A goalkeeper from Vietnam's second division has been banned for three games and fined ten million Vietnamese dong for his celebrations during a recent clash. Pham Tran Thanh Vu was penalised for a penalty in the 88th minute of Can Tho's clash with Cong An Nhan Dan, yet having kept the ball out – thereby preserving a point for his side – he then sprinted towards the referee and performed a knee-slide at his feet in celebration. "When I re-watched the video, I realised my behaviour was totally inappropriate," Vu admitted. In another twist, the referee's failure to book Vu meant that he was also handed a ban.

### 4 COVID CHAOS

Not for the first time this season, COVID testing protocols led to some bizarre situations, this time in a CONCACAF Olympic qualifier between Haiti and Honduras. A number of Haiti players and staff were late for pre-match testing, meaning that their results would not arrive in time for kick-off, forcing the team to field a starting line-up of just ten players, including a right-back in goal. During the match, a negative result came back for one of their goalkeepers, who was then able to join the action. To their credit, they only lost 3-0.

### 5 IN, OUT, IN, OUT

Kwame Poku's call-up for Ghana should have been a fairy tale. Just two years ago, the Colchester United midfielder was playing non-league football for Worthing, yet now found himself preparing for his first international cap. Then things got rather messy: Ghanaian fans and media criticised the decision to select a player from England's fourth tier, and Poku was subsequently dropped to the "A" team – who, bizarrely, were travelling to Uzbekistan for a friendly. Ghana's FA then performed another U-turn, and reinstated the 19-year-old for the 2022 World Cup qualifiers against South Africa and Sao Tome e Principe.

Kwame Poku...in action for League Two Colchester

"I turned down England maybe two or three times. It's a football country and for me…it makes sense that the manager is English and that it shouldn't work like a club"

**Arsene Wenger reveals to *beIN SPORTS* that he rejected the England national team job on numerous occasions**

# PEOPLE ON THE MOVE

## IN

### EUROPE

RB Leipzig confirmed that striker **BRIAN BROBBEY** will join them from Ajax on a four-year contract this summer.

In the English Football League, Birmingham City and Preston North End made managerial changes, with **LEE BOWYER** leaving Charlton Athletic to replace Aitor Karanka at the Blues and **FRANKIE McAVOY** replacing Alex Neil on an interim basis until the end of the season at Preston. Elsewhere **DANNY COWLEY** replaced Kenny Jackett at Portsmouth.

In the Eredivisie, VVV-Venlo hired a replacement for Hans de Koning, recruiting former Monchengladbach, Stuttgart and Sheffield Wednesday manager **JOS LUHUKAY.** Elsewhere, PEC Zwolle confirmed that **ART LANGELER** will become their new head coach at the end of the season.

Top prospect... Brian Brobbey

Milton Keynes Dons signed former Chelsea wonderkid **JOSH McEACHRAN** and Watford captured Colombian midfielder **CARLOS SANCHEZ**.

Aberdeen appointed ex-midfielder **STEPHEN GLASS** as manager after parting company with Derek McInnes.

### SOUTH AMERICA

Former Manchester United, Internazionale and Atletico Madrid striker **DIEGO FORLAN** took charge of Uruguayan second division outfit Atenas, his second job in management.

Veteran Brazilian defender **MIRANDA** returned to Sao Paulo. Elsewhere in Brazil, Atletico Mineiro announced **CUCA** as the club's new coach, marking his second stint in charge.

Coach...Diego Forlan

Former Schalke and PSV winger **JEFFERSON FARFAN** returned to former youth club Alianza Lima in Peru.

### CONCACAF

In MLS, Inter Miami announced the signing of three-time FA Cup winning-defender **KIERAN GIBBS**. He will join the Florida-based club when his contract with West Bromwich Albion expires at the end of the season. Elsewhere, Seattle Sounders announced the return of their record goalscorer **FREDY MONTERO**.

Miami-bound...Kieran Gibbs

### AFRICA

Egyptian Premier League giants Zamalek reappointed **PATRICE CARTERON** as the club's head coach, following the announcement that the White Knights had parted company with Jaime Pacheco.

Legend...Brown has played more games in Europe for Celtic than any other player

## End of an era

After 14 years representing Celtic, 35-year-old midfielder Scott Brown has signed a pre-contract agreement with Scottish Premier League rivals Aberdeen in a player-coach role. After being denied an unprecedented tenth consecutive league title by Steven Gerrard's Rangers this season, Brown has decided that it is the right time to embark on a new chapter in his career.

Brown has made more than 600 appearances for the Hoops since joining from Hibernian in 2007, winning ten league titles and 12 domestic cups during that time. Outgoing Celtic chief executive Peter Lawwell has described the midfielder as the most influential figure in Scottish football over the past 15 years.

"It's another one of our greats taken far too soon. Peter epitomises the word legend. A word thrown around far too often but he certainly was one at Leeds United"

**Ex-Leeds United and England goalkeeper Paul Robinson pays tribute to Peter Lorimer on *Sky Sports News***

## Appointments, sackings and loans

**Gutted...Chris Wilder**

OUT

### EUROPE

Sheffield United confirmed that manager **CHRIS WILDER** had left the club by mutual consent after almost five years in charge. He left the Blades bottom of the Premier League, with 14 points from 28 games.

Bayer Leverkusen fired **PETER BOSZ** after a run of one win in six league games, as well as being knocked out of the Europa League. Elsewhere in the Bundesliga, Borussia Monchengladbach confirmed that left-back **OSCAR WENDT** would be leaving the club this summer to return to Gothenburg on a free transfer.

After only returning to the Serie A outfit in November, former Italy coach **CESARE PRANDELLI** left Fiorentina and revealed plans to quit football.

After making comments that were deemed as damaging to the club's image, **YOUNES BELHANDA** had his contract terminated by Galatasaray.

### CONCACAF

In MLS, Philadelphia Union defender **RAYMON GADDIS** and ex-LA Galaxy midfielder **RAFAEL GARCIA** announced their retirements from playing.

### ASIA

Former Pohang Steelers and Suwon Samsung Bluewings goalkeeper **SHIN HWA-YONG** called an end to his career.

**Galatasaray exit... Younes Belhanda**

## OBITUARIES

**Jagielka...playing for Shrewsbury Town in 2000**

**Steve JAGIELKA**
(1978-2021)
The elder brother of Sheffield United and ex-England defender Phil Jagielka began his career at Stoke City but made his name at Shrewsbury Town where he made close to 200 appearances in all competitions over a six-year spell. After a season at Sheffield United in 2003-04 alongside his younger brother Phil, he then enjoyed two years with Accrington Stanley before starring for the likes of Droylsden, Telford and Hednesford.

**Peter LORIMER**
(1946-2021)
Leeds United's record goalscorer in all competitions was a mainstay in a side acknowledged as one of the best English teams of all time. Lorimer was voted as the club's ninth-greatest player, having won two league championships, an FA Cup, League Cup and two Fairs Cups between 1968 and 1974 under the management of Don Revie. He hit 238 goals in 705 games for Leeds over two spells, a return which leaves him more than 80 ahead of the next best in the club's history, John Charles.

His international career with Scotland was hampered by a ban for spending a summer playing for Cape Town City in apartheid-era South Africa, but he did make three appearances for his country at the 1974 World Cup. After ending his playing career, which also included spells at Toronto Blizzard, York City, Vancouver Whitecaps, UCD, Whitby Town and Hapoel Haifa, Lorimer moved into the media by working as a pundit for BBC Radio Leeds, as well as having a regular column in the *Yorkshire Evening Post*.

**Frank WORTHINGTON**
(1948-2021)
Once described by his former manager Ian Greaves as "the working man's George Best", Worthington began his career at Huddersfield Town before going on to make 200 appearances for Leicester City, as well as enjoying spells at Bolton Wanderers, Birmingham City, Leeds United, Southampton and Sunderland. He crammed over 800 appearances into his incredible football career, which saw him play in 22 consecutive Football League seasons from 1966 to 1987.

He won the Golden Boot playing for Bolton in the top division in 1978-79, finishing as leading scorer ahead of Liverpool's Kenny Dalglish and Arsenal's Frank Stapleton. Before that, he made eight appearances on the international stage for England in 1974, scoring in friendlies against Bulgaria and Argentina. Worthington even managed to fit in a spell as player-manager of Tranmere Rovers, before later becoming an after-dinner speaker once his playing days had come to an end.

**Character...Frank Worthington**

# ESM XI

## EUROPEAN SPORTS MEDIA

MARCH 2021

**SEASON RANKINGS**
Cumulative votes through the season

### GOALKEEPERS

| | |
|---|---|
| Jan Oblak (Atletico Madrid) | 26 |
| Ederson (Manchester City) | 13 |
| Edouard Mendy (Chelsea) | 6 |
| Manuel Neuer (Bayern Munich) | 4 |
| Gianluigi Donnarumma (Milan) | 4 |
| Thibaut Courtois (Real Madrid) | 3 |
| David De Gea (Manchester United) | 3 |
| Samir Handanovic (Internazionale) | 2 |
| Antonio Adan (Sporting) | 2 |
| Keylor Navas (Paris Saint-Germain) | 2 |
| Andrea Consigli (Sassuolo) | 1 |
| Alex Remiro (Real Sociedad) | 1 |
| Koen Casteels (Wolfsburg) | 1 |
| David Marshall (Derby County) | 1 |
| Hugo Lloris (Tottenham Hotspur) | 1 |
| Gianluigi Buffon (Juventus) | 1 |
| Alisson (Liverpool) | 1 |
| Bernd Leno (Arsenal) | 1 |
| Mike Maignan (Lille) | 1 |
| Bono (Sevilla) | 1 |
| Andreas Linde (Molde) | 1 |
| Kasper Schmeichel (Leicester City) | 1 |
| Marc-Andre Ter Stegen (Barcelona) | 1 |

### DEFENDERS

| | |
|---|---|
| Ruben Dias (Manchester City) | 26 |
| Joao Cancelo (Manchester City) | 22 |
| John Stones (Manchester City) | 16 |
| Sergio Ramos (Real Madrid) | 14 |
| Theo Hernandez (Milan) | 11 |
| Angelino (RB Leipzig) | 10 |
| David Alaba (Bayern Munich) | 9 |
| Mario Hermoso (Atletico Madrid) | 9 |
| Stefan Savic (Atletico Madrid) | 8 |
| Jose Gimenez (Atletico Madrid) | 8 |
| Milan Skriniar (Internazionale) | 7 |
| Andy Robertson (Liverpool) | 7 |
| Achraf Hakimi (Internazionale) | 7 |
| Ferland Mendy (Real Madrid) | 6 |
| Jordi Alba (Barcelona) | 6 |
| Dayot Upamecano (RB Leipzig) | 6 |
| Mats Hummels (Borussia Dortmund) | 5 |
| Benjamin Pavard (Bayern Munich) | 5 |
| Juan Cuadrado (Juventus) | 5 |
| Kieran Trippier (Atletico Madrid) | 5 |
| Kurt Zouma (Chelsea) | 5 |
| Ben Chilwell (Chelsea) | 4 |
| Simon Kjaer (Milan) | 4 |
| Trent Alexander-Arnold (Liverpool) | 4 |
| Antonio Rudiger (Chelsea) | 4 |
| Thiago Silva (Chelsea) | 3 |
| Dani Carvajal (Real Madrid) | 3 |
| Danilo (Juventus) | 3 |
| Jose Fonte (Lille) | 3 |
| Cristian Romero (Atalanta) | 3 |
| Robin Gosens (Atalanta) | 3 |
| Guillermo Maripan (Monaco) | 3 |
| Luke Shaw (Manchester United) | 3 |
| Pepe (Porto) | 2 |
| Cesar Azpilicueta (Chelsea) | 2 |
| Raphael Varane (Real Madrid) | 2 |
| Felipe (Atletico Madrid) | 2 |
| Reece James (Chelsea) | 2 |
| Thomas Meunier (Borussia Dortmund) | 2 |
| Sergio Reguilon (Tottenham Hotspur) | 2 |
| Alessio Romagnoli (Milan) | 2 |
| Lucas Vazquez (Real Madrid) | 2 |
| Willi Orban (RB Leipzig) | 2 |
| Brandon Mechele (Club Brugge) | 2 |
| Francesco Acerbi (Lazio) | 1 |
| Toby Alderweireld (Tottenham Hotspur) | 1 |
| Jordan Amavi (Marseille) | 1 |
| Dedryck Boyata (Hertha Berlin) | 1 |
| Cala (Cadiz) | 1 |
| Davide Calabria (Milan) | 1 |
| Sebastian Coates (Sporting) | 1 |
| Eric Dier (Tottenham Hotspur) | 1 |
| Dodo (Shakhtar Donetsk) | 1 |
| Jean-Kevin Duverne (Brest) | 1 |
| Fabinho (Liverpool) | 1 |
| Faitout Maouassa (Rennes) | 1 |
| Nicolas Gavory (Standard Liege) | 1 |
| Vincenzo Grifo (Freiburg) | 1 |
| Raphael Guerreiro (Borussia Dortmund) | 1 |
| Lucas Hernandez (Bayern Munich) | 1 |
| Michael Keane (Everton) | 1 |
| Jules Kounde (Sevilla) | 1 |
| Harry Maguire (Manchester United) | 1 |
| Chancel Mbemba (Porto) | 1 |
| Zaidu Sanusi (Porto) | 1 |
| Niklas Sule (Bayern Munich) | 1 |
| Pau Torres (Villarreal) | 1 |
| Kyle Walker (Manchester City) | 1 |
| Stefan de Vrij (Internazionale) | 1 |
| Ronald Araujo (Barcelona) | 1 |
| Nico Elvedi (Borussia Monchengladbach) | 1 |
| Nuno Mendes (Sporting) | 1 |
| Leonardo Spinazzola (Roma) | 1 |
| Matteo Darmian (Internazionale) | 1 |
| Nordi Mukiele (RB Leipzig) | 1 |
| Kevin Mbabu (Wolfsburg) | 1 |
| Evan N'Dicka (Eintracht Frankfurt) | 1 |
| Emerson (Real Betis) | 1 |
| Rafael Toloi (Atalanta) | 1 |
| Alphonso Davies (Bayern Munich) | 1 |
| Marcel Halstenberg (RB Leipzig) | 1 |
| Ramy Bensebaini (Monchengladbach) | 1 |
| Fikayo Tomori (Milan) | 1 |
| Marcos Alonso (Chelsea) | 1 |
| Marquinhos (Paris Saint-Germain) | 1 |
| Filip Helander (Rangers) | 1 |
| Pedro Porro (Sporting) | 1 |

### MIDFIELDERS

| | |
|---|---|
| Ilkay Gundogan (Manchester City) | 29 |
| Bruno Fernandes (Manchester United) | 26 |
| Kevin De Bruyne (Manchester City) | 22 |
| Joshua Kimmich (Bayern Munich) | 17 |
| Son Heung-min (Tottenham Hotspur) | 14 |
| Toni Kroos (Real Madrid) | 8 |
| Luka Modric (Real Madrid) | 8 |
| Frenkie de Jong (Barcelona) | 8 |
| Thomas Muller (Bayern Munich) | 7 |
| Leon Goretzka (Bayern Munich) | 7 |
| Nicolo Barella (Internazionale) | 6 |
| Mikel Oyarzabal (Real Sociedad) | 6 |
| Diogo Jota (Liverpool) | 5 |
| Casemiro (Real Madrid) | 5 |
| Mikel Merino (Real Sociedad) | 4 |
| Sergio Oliveira (Porto) | 4 |
| Hakan Calhanoglu (Milan) | 3 |
| Franck Kessie (Milan) | 3 |
| Houssem Aouar (Lyon) | 2 |
| Karl Toko Ekambi (Lyon) | 2 |
| Lars Stindl (Borussia Monchengladbach) | 2 |
| Kingsley Coman (Bayern Munich) | 2 |
| Pierre-Emile Hojbjerg (Tottenham) | 2 |
| Max Kruse (Union Berlin) | 2 |
| James Rodriguez (Everton) | 2 |
| David Silva (Real Sociedad) | 2 |
| Marcos Llorente (Atletico Madrid) | 2 |
| Joao Palhinha (Sporting) | 2 |
| Phil Foden (Manchester City) | 2 |
| N'Golo Kante (Chelsea) | 2 |
| Koke (Atletico Madrid) | 2 |
| Mason Mount (Chelsea) | 2 |
| Angel Di Maria (Paris Saint-Germain) | 1 |
| Benjamin Andre (Lille) | 1 |
| James Maddison (Leicester City) | 1 |
| Leon Bailey (Bayer Leverkusen) | 1 |
| Jonathan Bamba (Lille) | 1 |

| | |
|---|---|
| Ismael Bennacer (Milan) | 1 |
| Domenico Berardi (Sassuolo) | 1 |
| Papu Gomez (Sevilla) | 1 |
| Jack Grealish (Aston Villa) | 1 |
| Davy Klaassen (Ajax) | 1 |
| Manuel Locatelli (Sassuolo) | 1 |
| Sergej Milinkovic-Savic (Lazio) | 1 |
| Dani Olmo (RB Leipzig) | 1 |
| Riyad Mahrez (Manchester City) | 1 |
| Henrikh Mkhitaryan (Roma) | 1 |
| Leandro Paredes (Paris Saint-Germain) | 1 |
| Yusuf Yazici (Lille) | 1 |
| Pedri (Barcelona) | 1 |
| Luis Alberto (Lazio) | 1 |
| Raul Garcia (Athletic Bilbao) | 1 |
| Jordan Henderson (Liverpool) | 1 |
| Thomas Lemar (Atletico Madrid) | 1 |
| Paul Pogba (Manchester United) | 1 |
| Marcel Sabitzer (RB Leipzig) | 1 |
| Jonathan Ikone (Lille) | 1 |
| Jesse Lingard (West Ham United) | 1 |
| Marco Verratti (Paris Saint-Germain) | 1 |
| Aleksandr Golovin (Monaco) | 1 |
| Tomas Soucek (West Ham United) | 1 |
| Rodri (Manchester City) | 1 |
| Nabil Fekir (Real Betis) | 1 |
| Jorginho (Chelsea) | 1 |
| Youri Tielemans (Leicester City) | 1 |
| Amine Gouiri (Nice) | 1 |

### FORWARDS

| | |
|---|---|
| Robert Lewandowski (Bayern Munich) | 57 |
| Lionel Messi (Barcelona) | 24 |
| Romelu Lukaku (Internazionale) | 20 |
| Erling Haaland (Borussia Dortmund) | 20 |
| Zlatan Ibrahimovic (Milan) | 14 |
| Kylian Mbappe (Paris Saint-Germain) | 13 |
| Karim Benzema (Real Madrid) | 13 |
| Cristiano Ronaldo (Juventus) | 10 |
| Luis Suarez (Atletico Madrid) | 7 |
| Joao Felix (Atletico Madrid) | 7 |
| Harry Kane (Tottenham Hotspur) | 6 |
| Youssef En-Nesyri (Sevilla) | 6 |
| Andre Silva (Eintracht Frankfurt) | 5 |
| Mohamed Salah (Liverpool) | 4 |
| Ciro Immobile (Lazio) | 4 |
| Marcus Rashford (Manchester United) | 3 |
| Jamie Vardy (Leicester City) | 2 |
| Burak Yilmaz (Lille) | 2 |
| Pote (Sporting) | 1 |
| Iago Aspas (Celta Vigo) | 1 |
| Anwar El Ghazi (Aston Villa) | 1 |
| Olivier Giroud (Chelsea) | 1 |
| Sadio Mane (Liverpool) | 1 |
| Dominic Calvert-Lewin (Everton) | 1 |
| Alvaro Morata (Juventus) | 1 |
| Kevin Volland (Monaco) | 1 |
| Hakim Ziyech (Chelsea) | 1 |
| Giorgos Giakoumakis (VVV-Venlo) | 1 |
| Josip Ilicic (Atalanta) | 1 |
| Jadon Sancho (Borussia Dortmund) | 1 |
| Antoine Griezmann (Barcelona) | 1 |
| Kelechi Iheanacho (Leicester City) | 1 |
| Wout Weghorst (Wolfsburg) | 1 |

**ESM MEMBERS:** *A Bola* (Portugal), *Fanatik* (Turkey), *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (Germany), *La Gazzetta dello Sport* (Italy), *Kicker* (Germany), *Marca* (Spain), *Nemzeti Sport* (Hungary), *Sport Express* (Russia), *Sport/Foot* (Belgium), *De Telegraaf* (Netherlands), *TIPS Bladet* (Denmark), *ElfVoetbal* (Netherlands), *World Soccer* (England)

# Face to face: CIRO IMMOBILE

**The 2019-20 ESM Golden Shoe winner discusses his award-winning season, his career so far and this summer's European Championship…**

Goal machine… Immobile hit 36 goals last season

**It took a little while, but now the Golden Shoe is finally yours…**
It was OK to wait for it. The main thing is that I have it now [smiles].

**You are only the third Italian winner after Luca Toni and Francesco Totti. After a *Romanista*, a *Laziale* couldn't be missing, could he?**
Correct [laughs]. Both are world champions and were extraordinary players, which makes me immensely proud to follow their names. Also, to see my name among all these great footballers who won it before me.

**Was it also a response to a lot of the criticism you received in your career?**
Maybe you could call it a kind of revenge. Not against anyone personally, though. In football, everyone gets their moment, and last season I got mine.

**At the moment, though, it's not a good moment for anyone. How have you experienced the COVID year?**
It was a very difficult period for everyone. I miss the social life, the meetings with friends and family.

**What is COVID-football like?**
Less than you're used to. With the absence of fans, the most important thing of all is missing: the passion, the emotion, the roar in the stadium after a goal, celebrating a victory with the fans. That's why I dedicate this award not only to the club and my team-mates but also to the *tifosi*.

**More time at home, have you discovered new passions?**
Above all, cooking and gardening at home – and dancing with my wife and children. That's what keeps me going [laughs].

**At 17, you left your home in the south, Torre Annunziata, near Naples, to join Juventus in Turin, a radical change.**
It was a difficult transition between two completely different realities. At the time, I was young and full of dreams of making it in Serie A. To do that, you have to make sacrifices and have an absolute love for *calcio*. I worked hard to make it to the Golden Shoe. I know that many youngsters have these dreams but are going through a difficult time right now. Grit your teeth, don't give up! Everyone has a chance to realise their dream.

**Is it true your mother came to Turin to give you a piece of her mind after the transfer?**
Yes. It was my birthday and she said: "Hurry up and come back home. What are you doing here in Turin?" [laughs]. Luckily, I didn't listen to Mum for once.

**You come from a devout family. Have you kept your faith until today?**
Definitely. A month ago, I had a private audience with the Pope together with the club president Claudio Lotito. It was a very emotional day for me.

**What did he tell you?**
He liked the fact that I have three children. He likes big families and told me to have more children. I'd better not refuse the Pope!

**Eight clubs in eight years, now with Lazio continuously since 2016. What made you decide to put down roots here?**
We are all happy in Rome. My family loves it here, and with the club and coach Simone Inzaghi we've been building a project together for years that has brought us many successes. So we want to work on more.

**At Lazio, you had to match the legacy of Miroslav Klose…**
That was difficult because Miro was an idol here. The situation was reminiscent of Dortmund when I succeeded Robert Lewandowski. It's impossible to replace such exceptional players, you can only try to find your own path.

**Now you have overtaken Klose in terms of goals.**
I don't like these comparisons. Besides, Miro wasn't at Lazio for as long as I've been here.

**What were your experiences of playing in Germany and Spain?**
I took a lot away from Germany and Spain. Experiencing other cultures and ways of thinking is always a helpful learning process, both personally and football-wise. Even if things didn't go perfectly in sporting terms.

**How did you find playing under Jurgen Klopp?**
Fighting spirit. The will to fight for every ball burned into you from his eyes when he spoke to you.

**And Zdenek Zeman?**
Fast-paced, endless attack. That brought me my first title as top goalscorer in Serie B in 2011-12 at Pescara. By the way, that was also a team with Lorenzo Insigne and Marco Verratti.

**You now work under Roberto Mancini in the national team. Before he took over, you missed the last World Cup…**
One of the darkest moments of my career. As is often the case in life, we learned our lessons from it so that such a disappointment would not happen again. Under Mancini we have been doing a fantastic job. The *tifosi* are really excited about the *Azzurri* again.

**How do you rate the national team's chances at the Euros?**
We have a very strong team with many youngsters who are ready. This team has great prospects and we are very optimistic. Having our group matches in Rome will give us additional motivation.

**On average you score one goal every four games for Italy…**
I've scored so many goals at club level I've used up my powder with the *Azzurri!* [laughs] It's true, I do have to work on my scoring rate.

**What is your next personal goal besides the Euros?**
To win another Golden Shoe.

*Interview by Oliver Birkner, Kicker/ESM*

# Joachim Low

## 61-year-old to step down as Germany coach after Euro 2020

Only time will tell if the German federation, the DFB, made the right call when giving advanced warning in March that national team coach, Joachim Low, in the post for 15 years, would be stepping down after Euro 2020.

"Jogi" Low, who since the *Nationalmannschaft*'s humiliating first-phase exit from World Cup 2018, has been on the receiving end of much criticism from fans and media alike, obviously hopes the announcement will take some of the vitriol and heat out of the situation. But it's an equally dangerous game for the *Bundestrainer* to play. The concept of a "farewell tour" is a risky business, with the real prospect that Jogi swiftly turns into a lame duck figure, shorn of authority and cachet. Knowing that the man in charge only has a limited shelf-life, will the players be prepared to listen and follow?

Naturally Low and the DFB will be keeping their fingers crossed that a markedly different phenomenon occurs. That the squad rally round Low and bust a gut for a last hurrah. "As far as the upcoming European Championship is concerned, I continue to have the absolute determination to do well, as well as great energy and ambition," Low told a press conference. "I will do my best to make us successful and for our fans to enjoy the tournament. I also know that this applies to the entire team."

A timetable for Low's departure could be best for all parties involved: the man himself, the DFB and the team. For the last three years or so, the ferocious debate in the media about Low's future has proved a major distraction. Every below-par performance or poor result – and especially the 6-0 drubbing in the Nations League against Spain last November – has resulted in even more toxicity. A line in the sand had to be drawn. With the coach's destiny mapped out, the DFB are banking on the press backing off somewhat, giving Low the chance to concentrate on the job in hand.

For all his trials and tribulations in recent years – the Russia 2018 debacle and a pair of insipid Nations League campaigns in 2018-19 and 2020-21 – Low still deserves to be regarded as one of the great *Bundestrainers* of all-time. On a par with such icons as Sepp Herberger and Helmut Schon. Not only did Low's teams bristle with competitiveness, claiming the world title in 2014, reaching the final of Euro 2008 and featuring in three other big tournament semi-finals. They were pleasing on the eye as well, a thrilling mix of high-tempo attacking intent, flair and guile.

Tactically-savvy and keen to promote youngsters, Low very much changed the face of the German national team, taking what was essentially a muscular grind-it-out culture and transforming it into something far more academic, thoughtful and pro-active. Low was the radical moderniser who delivered in spades. Under his tutelage a team of hard-running, resilient bruisers morphed into a crew of creatives. Gritty effectiveness was no longer enough.

> "As far as the upcoming European Championship is concerned, I continue to have the absolute determination to do well, as well as great energy and ambition"
>
> **Joachim Low**

**Speculation... Hansi Flick is under contract at Bayern until 2023**

The fruits of multiculturalism also forms part of his legacy. He consistently placed his faith in the sons of foreign "guest workers" and over the years, the *Nationalmannschaft* has been a true melting pot, featuring a plethora of different ethnicities: Germans, Turks, Tunisians, Poles, Ghanaians, Albanians, Spaniards and Swiss. In this sense, Jogi was a real force for good.

To whom will the leadership baton be passed? Number one on the short-list is thought to be Bayern Munich boss Hansi Flick, who as well as steering the Bavarians to a clean sweep last term (Champions League, Bundesliga and DFB-Pokal Cup) also spent four years serving as Low's assistant for the German national team. Bayern, though,

have no intention of letting Flick go without a fight. They have him under contract until 2023 and expect him to honour it.

Flick, however, may have other ideas, especially with media reports circulating that he and Bayern sporting director Hasan Salihamidzic are at loggerheads, arguing like cat and dog over recruitment matters.

On many occasions down the years, the DFB have kept the appointment process in-house and they could go down the same route again. Under-21 head coach Stefan Kuntz, a former Kaiserslautern, Arminia Bielefeld and Bochum striker who won 25 caps for Germany and helped them claim the European title in 1996, is very well thought off in federation circles and certainly has the competence, personality and charisma for this high-profile role. Low's current number two, Marcus Sorg, is a far longer shot to take over.

*Nick Bidwell*

# Patrice Motsepe

## South African billionaire lays out his plan as new CAF president

The new Confederation of African Football president Patrice Motsepe is certainly a different cut to that of his predecessors.

The South African mining magnate, 59, was the first black African to be ranked on *Forbes* magazine's list of billionaires, making his fortune by turning unprofitable, low-producing gold mines into cash cows after first starting out as a lawyer.

His net worth is now estimated at $3 billion and over the last decade he has pledged to give half of it away, taking on any charitable cause.

Certainly, his passion for his club Mamelodi Sundowns, which he bought into some 15 years ago, has tugged at his pocket, turning the Pretoria-based side into an all-conquering domestic force and also African Champions League winners in 2016.

His impact on the South African football market has been akin to that Roman Abramovich initially made at Chelsea and the Qataris have done to Ligue 1 with their investment into Paris Saint-Germain.

His business interests now stretch to agriculture, financial services and telecommunications, and as the brother-in-law of South African president Cyril Ramaphosa he is close to the centre of power in his country, but somehow Motsepe has been seduced into taking on the CAF presidency.

He says he turned down the idea several times before being persuaded but then needed the assistance of FIFA president Gianni Infantino – in the end elected unopposed after a deal was brokered to give his main rivals vice-presidents posts.

It is still not clear what a man of his acumen, diversity of interests, influence and wealth wants to do at the helm of African football. He has little, if nothing, in common with the self-serving sports politicians he will now be surrounded by.

But he has obviously been seduced by the chance to sit at football's high table as he automatically becomes a FIFA vice-president.

If committed to the job, he could prove a Godsend for the African game, able to flick through his rolodex to badger business contacts across the world into sponsoring various CAF competitions. His profile alone takes the organisation out of the sewer his predecessor Ahmad Ahmad dragged it through.

"Motsepe brings an integrity and a reputation to the African game that has never been seen before," says South African Football Association president Danny Jordaan.

But will he devote the necessary time to the many, and mostly, pernickety issues that bedevil the African game? He has spoken about making African football a competitive force in the world game – especially after none of the five countries at the last World Cup in Russia made it past the first round – but if his performances at his first two post-election press conferences are anything to go by, he only has superficial command of the issues in the African game.

> "Motsepe brings an integrity and a reputation to the African game that has never been seen before"
>
> **South African Football Association president Danny Jordaan**

But he did promise: "I have no doubt in my mind that I am not going to be president of an organisation which, four years from now, hasn't had significant, practical, tangible and accessible progress."

*Mark Gleeson*

**Ambitious... Motsepe says an African team must win the World Cup in the "near future"**

# Jamaica

## Caribbean nation targeting influx of English-born talent

Jamaica's most famous footballer never played a game for the "Reggae Boyz". Instead, John Barnes won 79 caps for England and scored 11 goals between 1983 and 1995, in an international career that included two World Cups and ended with induction into the English Football Hall of Fame.

In modern times, the Caribbean island's most recognisable player is Manchester City's Raheem Sterling. The Kingston-born attacker is just 26 years old and already has over 50 caps. However, he also spends his international match days on duty for the "Three Lions", rather than the country of his birth.

Top target... Michail Antonio is reportedly set to become a Jamaica international

> "This generation of players want to play for us in no uncertain terms because they think they can play in a World Cup"
> **Rudolph Speid, Jamaica Football Federation**

Payback seems to be on the way, though, with the remarkable news that over a dozen recognisable England-born players with Jamaican heritage are set to make the reverse trip to Barnes and Sterling.

West Ham United forward Michail Antonio, Everton defender Mason Holgate and Bayer Leverkusen winger Demarai Gray, formerly of Leicester City, top the list of would-be additions to Jamaica's Qatar 2022 World Cup qualifying efforts.

The 30-year-old Antonio was called up twice by England without getting on the field, having turned down Jamaica's advances in 2016. In March, *Sky Sports* reported that he had reversed that decision, although he didn't take part in that month's friendly against USA.

Holgate and Gray, both 24, have been capped for England at youth level, while Norwich full-back Max Aarons, has just been to the Euros with Aidy Boothroyd's England Under-21s.

They are, with all due respect, a different kettle of fish entirely to when the relatively unknown England-born trio of Deon Burton, Fitzroy Simpson and Paul Hall joined the Jamaica team in 1997, and helped the Boyz to an historic spot at the 1998 World Cup in France.

Jamaica Football Federation (JFF) technical and development committee chairman Rudolph Speid suggested that the recruitment process for the impending influx of talent was far more straightforward than one might assume.

"Part of it was not our doing, because these players really want to play international football," said Speid. "Other Premier League players chose to play for Jamaica and they are seeing they can do the same, so it is not so much that we went out looking for them.

"For a long time, we have had players from England who reached out to play for us, like Wes Morgan. I think the main difference is that the players who are coming to us are getting younger and younger.

"Premier League players at that level talk to each other and I think it has become more popular to play for Jamaica."

Since the 1998 campaign, Michael Johnson, Wes Morgan, Giles Barnes, Adrian Mariappa and Michael Hector number among the players who decided to represent the land of

Reggae Boyz...Jamaica haven't reached a World Cup since 1998

### "UB40" PLAYERS

**CURRENT SQUAD**
Adrian Mariappa *(Bristol City)*
Michael Hector *(Fulham)*
Bobby Decordova-Reid *(Fulham)*
Greg Leigh *(Aberdeen)*
Ravel Morrison *(Unattached)*

**MARCH FIRST-TIME CALL-UPS**
Amari'i Bell *(Blackburn)*
Wes Harding *(Rotherham United)*
Liam Moore *(Reading)*
Ethan Pinnock *(Brentford)*
Curtis Tilt *(Wigan)*
Kasey Palmer *(Bristol City)*
Andre Gray *(Watford)*
Jamal Lowe *(Swansea City)*

**REPORTED TARGETS**
Michail Antonio *(West Ham United)*
Mason Holgate *(Everton)*
Max Aarons *(Norwich)*
Demarai Gray *(Bayer Leverkusen)*
Isaac Hayden *(Newcastle United)*
Natahan Redmond *(Southampton)*
Kemar Roofe *(Rangers)*
Ivan Toney *(Brentford)*

their parents, rather than their place of birth.

"The influx of players we have now is very much different to what we got [in 1997]," said Speid. "When you call the names of the players who want to represent Jamaica now, they resonate right away to our football fans.

"This generation of players want to play for us in no uncertain terms because they think they can play in a World Cup."

If a steady stream looks set to become a flood, it is because the recent football fortunes of the island of just under three million people – roughly a third of the population of London – make it an attractive destination for ambitious players.

The Boyz reached the final of both the 2015 and 2017 CONCACAF Gold Cups, and the semi-finals in 2019. At present, the Jamaican team is ranked 47th in the world and third in CONCACAF, trailing only the United States and Mexico.

CONCACAF has three automatic berths and a play-off spot for the Qatar World Cup. Jamaica would have fancied their chances, even before Antonio offered his formidable frame to the cause.

However, not all Jamaica fans are pleased about the new "UB40" members – the nickname for England-born Jamaican footballers in reference to the British reggae band. It is not a flattering reference.

"The reaction is mixed in the Jamaican public," said Speid, "but I think the purists of the game are excited. The Premier League has the best coaches in the world and they select players based on how good you are, not where you are from. If they think these players are good enough for them, who are we to say they are not good enough for Jamaica? We welcome them if they can contribute and that is the end of the story."

Enhanced by their new British-born talent, Jamaica could become one of CONCACAF's most feared teams in the immediate future. After benefitting royally from the likes of Barnes and Sterling, perhaps England owe the Reggae Boyz at least as much.

*Lasana Liburd*

# Mohamed Ihattaren

## Mercurial talent faces an uncertain future

Mohamed Ihattaren had just turned 17 when he debuted for PSV Eindhoven two years ago, hailed as the next sensation to emerge from Dutch football.

But now, having just turned 19, that promise has wavered off course, with the midfielder kicked out of the PSV Eindhoven squad and his prospects now at a crossroads.

Ihattaren's potential had been such that the Dutch football association (KNVB) and then-national coach Ronald Koeman actively courted him soon after his club debut, desperate to avoid a repetition of their failure to hook in Hakim Ziyech for the national team.

> "It's not always easy for promising young players with all the hype around them, but ultimately you cannot change people, they must change themselves"
>
> **PSV coach Roger Schmidt**

Ihattaren already has 30 caps for the Netherlands youth teams from Under-15s up to Under-19 level, but his Moroccan heritage offered him another avenue to compete in international football. Hence why there was such relief when he declared for the Dutch. Call-ups to the senior team followed, although a combination of injury and illness has kept him from a full international debut.

**Talent...Ihattaren had two goals and two assists in the Eredivisie before his suspension**

Now, that looks some way off. PSV head coach Roger Schmidt banished Ihattaren from the first team, questioning his attitude in the wake of being dropped for the crucial Europa League tie against Olympiakos in February.

He was accused of sulking in the wake of his benching, at a time when his team-mates felt they all needed to pull together in adversity if they were to get past the Greek club.

The club claimed that his banishment was a decision taken in consultation with irritated team-mates, although others refute this. But Schmidt said: "It was a totally unacceptable attitude."

Ihattaren had previously been in trouble over a series of incidents, including dust-ups in training and failure to pitch up for sponsors' activities. He was also forced on a diet after returning far too heavy for the new season.

"Every one of us wants to help him and offer him support, but it can't be a one-way street – something must also come from the other side," said Schmidt. "It's not always easy for promising young players with all the hype around them, but ultimately you cannot change people, they must change themselves."

There is little doubt about his ability, but PSV's patience looks up and Ihattaren's agent Mino Raiola added to the fire with heavy criticism of the club and suggestions his player could be gone at the season's end.

But where to with a tardy reputation? His contract runs until the end of next season, and past discussions over an extension have proven inconclusive. If PSV want to make any money they need to sell him soon.

Since the PSV bust-up, Ajax coach Erik ten Hag has pointedly hailed Ihattaren, although whether the Amsterdammers would risk the harmony in their own camp on a mercurial personality remains to be seen. They have had their fair share of starlets being blinded in the spotlight.

But Ten Hag did add: "He's more than just a good footballer, he's a fantastic talent. I hope matters are sorted so we can see him playing in the [Dutch] league again."

*Mark Gleeson*

# Royale Union Saint-Gilloise

## Belgium's third-most successful club returns to top flight

After an absence of 48 years, Royale Union Saint-Gilloise are back at the elite level of Belgian football.

Founded in 1897 by local teenagers, Union had none of the resources of the elitist Racing Club de Bruxelles and Leopold Club de Bruxelles. But then Racing donated a few shirts and a match ball to the upstarts, and soon Union settled in the neighbourhood of St Gillis and their stadium in Duden Park to become the team to beat.

Prior to the Second World War they dominated Belgian football, winning the domestic crown seven times before 1914, including a record-breaking goal difference of +88 in 1909. Union supplied six players for Belgium's gold medal-winning team at the 1920 Olympics in Antwerp. Their stadium hosted games at the tournament too, with a Spanish national team starring legendary goalkeeper Ricardo Zamora playing their first-ever official game there.

From 1932-35, Union won the league title three more times, going 60 league matches unbeaten. That unbeaten streak represented both the absolute heydays of Union, but also the signpost of a troubled future. They'd never again win the league title. The glamour and glory faded from a club that simply couldn't keep up.

In Brussels, the pendulum was swinging. Across the canal, Albert Roosens was professionalising Anderlecht and the French coach Pierre Sinibaldi introduced an elegant, front-foot game. Paul Van Himst galvanized Anderlecht and "champagne football" was born.

After the war, Union were relegated from the top division for the first time in 1949. They did return, and even enjoyed some European forays, reaching the semi-finals of the Inter-Cities Fairs Cup in 1960, where they lost 8-4 on aggregate to Birmingham City. But decades in the doldrums were to follow. They shuttled around the Belgian amateur leagues for years.

However, in recent times Union have enjoyed a renaissance. Brighton & Hove Albion owner Tony Bloom, businessman and gambler, acquired the club from Jurgen Baatzsch. The German entrepreneur bought the club in 2013 and guided Union to 1B, Belgian football's second tier. His successor used his Premier League expertise and knowhow to propel the club forward. In 2018-19, the club reached the semi-finals of the domestic cup, eliminating both Anderlecht and Racing Genk.

This season, Union dominated 1B, playing attacking football despite coach Felice Mazzu's penchant for a defensive set-up. In 2019, Mazzu left Genk in acrimonious fashion, but in the capital he found calm, purpose and a data-driven approach to the game so as to rejuvenate his own career and mould a group of eclectic players into a championship-winning team.

In a 3-5-2 formation, Union swept past opponents. It was all the more sweet that a 2-1 victory against arch-rivals RWD Molenbeek in the "Zwanze Derby" ensured Union's return to the elite level with five more rounds of matches left to play. In defeat, opposing coach Vincent

**Champions...Union players celebrate on the pitch**

**Promotion...Union supporters gather after victory in the "Zwanze Derby" v RWD Molenbeek**

**Felice Mazzu...the coach celebrates with his players**

> Can the club with its antiquated stadium and deep roots in the fabric of Brussels' football culture compete again?

*Credit: @rusg.brussels Instagram*

**Duden Park... Union's tiny yet historic stadium**

Euvrard was generous enough to shower the new champions with praise. He said: "Union is the deserved champion."

But what comes next for Union in the top flight? Can the club with its antiquated stadium and deep roots in the fabric of Brussels' football culture compete again?

The club has a cult status, but not the means and facilities to be competitive at the very highest level. The Duden Park overlooks the club's Stadium Joseph Marien, with a main stand in Art Deco style. A cultural heritage site, the stadium oozes indelible richness and history, and the small but romantic club enjoys limited core support as well as interest from students, hipsters, eurocrats and many ground-hoppers. Attending a match of Union is modish. Last renovated in 2018 at a cost of €4.2 million, the stadium holds a capacity of 8,000, but is not equipped to welcome sponsors and press properly. Fan comfort is minimal.

The club has previously played at the Heysel Stadium on a temporary basis, but Union's hierarchy has vowed that in the first two seasons in the top flight the team will remain in the Duden Park. Bloom and his board however are caught between a rock and a hard place: moving out in the long run will nullify the club's authenticity, but staying put severely limits any commercial exploitation, and modifications to a cultural heritage site are not allowed.

For now though, the club's atypical infrastructure can wait. Union will prioritise sporting fortunes in the Pro League. Last February, they were given a reminder of the demands in the top flight, when they were hammered 5-0 by Anderlecht in the Belgian Cup.

Yet the 1A newcomers can take heart from the examples of both OH Leuven and Beerschot. Last summer both clubs – backed by King Power and Saudi Prince Abdullah bin Mosaad respectively – returned to the elite level and excelled. In autumn, Beerschot led the table and later in the season Leuven briefly challenged for play-off I. In seasons to come, Union would gladly settle for that.

*Samindra Kunti*

# Will Still

## Europe's youngest top-flight coach making waves in Belgium

It might have come as a bolt from the blue for those outside of Belgian club Beerschot when 28-year-old Will Still was chosen to replace Hernan Losada, as he headed across the Atlantic to DC United. Internally however, it was an obvious choice.

Picking the Anglo-Belgian for the job made him the youngest coach at a top-level club in Europe since the last World War, continuing his rapid catapult up from video analyst and then assistant coach, to taking charge of the Antwerp-based club.

He had been an active assistant under Losada. "I was close to him and did 70 to 80 per cent of the training," Still explains. And Beerschot's chairman, Francis Vranken, saw the potential. "We were aware of his qualities. He was very important in Beerschot's development from Division 1B up until now. Our choice to upgrade him was logical. People who work hard for our club get rewarded for that."

Beerschot won promotion last season and were early season frontrunners in this campaign, but tumbled down to tenth when Losada left. In his first nine league games, Still won four and lost three, to take the team back to seventh before the international break in March.

Born in Belgium to English parents in a football-obsessed family, Still was raised in Britain where he first worked at Preston North End, coaching the Under-14s and Under-18s, while studying at Myerscough College. "But my dream was always to become a professional footballer. At 19 I realised I wouldn't make it."

He returned to Belgium, first as a video analyst at Standard Liege, before being promoted to assistant coach at Lierse and then becoming head coach of the second division outfit.

> "I want to be as good as I possibly can be, irrespective of my age. I was 24 when I coached at Lierse. Julian Nagelsmann was 28 when he began in the Bundesliga"

"The age issue does bring attention. But I want to be as good as I possibly can be, irrespective of my age. I was 24 when I coached at Lierse. Julian Nagelsmann was 28 when he began in the Bundesliga. So, all is possible."

Some of his players are older than him, but for Still that is nothing to be concerned about. "I don't do anything to show or say, 'I am the boss'. I don't walk around like Napoloen. I try to win respect with the standard of my training and analysis. The players understand: 'Will is here to help and not to create a circus'."

Losada offered him the chance to also go to DC United as his assistant. "But Beerschot offered me the job. They said I'd become head coach one day, so why not now?" explains Still.

"They said, 'if it goes well, we'll take it further' and if not, maybe I'd work under a new coach. I felt they trusted me and what did I have to lose? This is not going to make or break me. If it doesn't go well, it's not the end of my career. I am living my ambition but I've worked hard to get here. And I will continue to work; my dreams aren't ending at the age of 28."

*Mark Gleeson*

**Still...Beerschot appointed the Englishman in January**

eye witness

Ryan Baldi reports

ENGLAND

# A special kid

## The story of Phil Foden's meteoric rise, from those who helped him along the way

At a 2012 youth tournament in Madrid, Manchester City's Under-12s proved no match for their Juventus counterparts. Managed by legendary striker Fabrizio Ravanelli, the Italian youngsters were bigger, stronger and more athletic than the English kids. Real Madrid, Barcelona and Anderlecht were all represented, and all advanced beyond the competition's group stage; City did not.

Nevertheless, it was one of City's young players that elicited excited whispers among coaches and, despite his side's failure, was named the overall best player. The Juventus coach sought out Phil Foden as soon as the final whistle blew, wrapping his arm around the tiny pre-teen for a photograph.

**Made in Manchester... a mural of Foden in his home city**

"This kid is going to be special," Ravanelli prophesised.

Foden was just six years old when he was spotted by City. The club's head of academy recruitment, Terry John, put on a coaching session at Bridge Hall Primary School in Stockport. After running a group of eight-year-olds – which included Foden's older brother Callum – through basic drills, John asked if he could do the same with a younger class. One boy immediately caught the eye. He was smaller than his peers, but the natural balance and close control he displayed as he dribbled between training cones was striking. John left his business card with Foden's teacher and asked that the boy's parents contact him – Manchester City were interested in their son.

"I sat both parents down," John remembers. "I said, 'Look, you've got a little diamond.'"

Academies in English football are precluded from signing children before they reach Under-9 level. Instead, City fostered affiliations with ten local grassroots clubs around Greater Manchester. The Premier League club would place their youngest recruits with one of these local teams until they could be formally signed. The nearest of those clubs to where Foden grew up in Edgeley, Stockport, was Reddish Vulcans.

"On one of the first nights Phil came down to training," says Joe Makin, a coach with the Vulcans, "this dad [of another player] came to me and said, 'He's good, isn't he? Where's this new lad from?'"

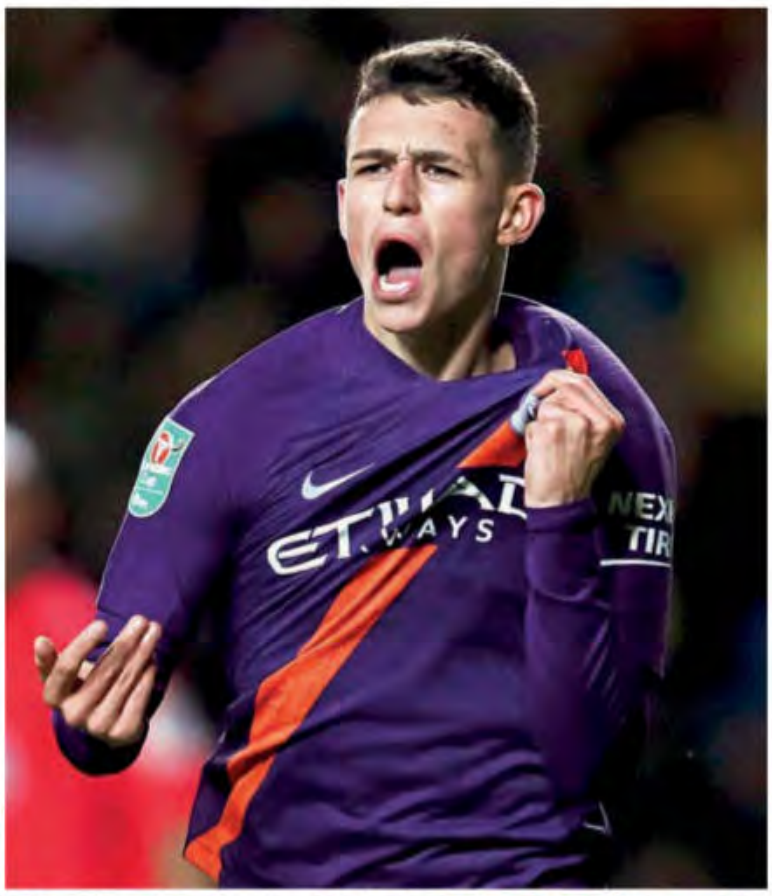
Makin paused for effect, pressed his palms together and looked skyward. "Heaven," he replied.

The Vulcans won tournament after tournament with Foden amid their ranks. At one competition held at a Pontins resort in Prestatyn, Wales, the coaches decided to field their City-bound prodigy in defence, such was the ease with which he found the game further forward. Foden wasn't encumbered by the change of position; he simply dribbled the length of the pitch, beating any opponent in his way, and scored at will. "We don't play football like this in Wales," one parent was overheard remarking.

Just as City had chosen Foden, so Foden chose City. Hailing from a family with both red and blue affiliations – his father, Phil senior, is a Manchester United fan – the fact he played for City convinced the young Foden that they were the club he would support. When he was able to officially sign for their academy, shortly after his eighth birthday, the club's staff found themselves as enthralled by the youngster as he was by his surroundings.

"We used to call him 'Little Messi,'" remembers Jim Cassell, City's former academy director, "because his balance was so good, he could go past people for fun and his control was excellent."

"Straightaway you could see he was miles ahead, in football intelligence, technically, his understanding, his awareness," adds Scott Sellars,



**City fan...Foden celebrates scoring his first senior goal in a Carabao Cup clash with Oxford United**

**World Cup winner... Foden greets fans after winning the Under-17 World Cup in India**

Wolves' technical director who was head of academy coaching at City during Foden's early years. "He was exceptional. You could see he had a lot of potential."

City's coaches strove to find ways to test the gifted midfielder. During a round of fixtures at the club's former training ground in Carrington, coach Steve Eyre was overseeing a tense encounter between his U14s and a Middlesbrough side coached by former City player Jamie Pollock. Locked at 1-1 at half-time, Eyre noticed that the U10s were flying on an adjacent pitch, up 10-0 with Foden responsible for five goals. Eyre consulted with Pollock and the referee to see whether they'd agree to allow Foden to play the remainder of the U14s game.

"I explained it was very much for his development," Eyre says. "I think Jamie Pollock was rubbing his hands that I was considering to do such a thing, bringing an U10, small boy, into an U14s fixture so evenly poised."

As the matches around the site finished, a crowd of parents and coaches gathered three deep on the touchline and behind the goal. "They were watching this young, would-be superstar enter the field and play with the big boys," Eyre says.

City went on to win 2-1. The winning goal? A Phil Foden diving header.

In an U11 game the following season, Foden scored four goals by chipping the goalkeeper from outside the penalty area. Sellars summoned him to the touchline at a break in play. "Right," the coach said, "from now on, you can't shoot from outside the box. You've got to dribble now. You can only score from inside the box."

"And he did," Sellars says. "He scored a couple more."

By this stage, Foden's talent was no secret within youth football circles, and, known locally as "Ronnie" – a nickname given to him by his grandfather – he'd become something of a celebrity in his hometown. "People would come up and say, 'Do you know Ronnie?'" says Luke Bolton, a youth team-mate and fellow Stockport native. "They were like, 'He's unbelievable, isn't he?' And I'd say, 'Yeah, absolutely.' He was by far the most technical player I've ever seen. I thought I was good at football, then I saw him."

**Team-mate... Luke Bolton**

> "I thought I was good at football, then I saw him"
>
> **Foden's fellow academy graduate Luke Bolton**

In 2017, though, Foden began to command attention on a national scale. It started with stellar performances in the FA Youth Cup. Playing alongside Jadon Sancho, he helped power City's youngsters to the final, where they lost to Chelsea. He then starred at the European U17 Championship in May, scoring in the final as England lost on penalties to Spain.

He'd begun to train intermittently with the City first team a year earlier – "Did you see that kid in the centre of the field?" Pep Guardiola said to one of his assistants after Foden's first session with the seniors. A debut appearance came in the summer of 2017, in a friendly against rivals Manchester United.

The crystallisation of Foden's rapid rise occurred in October of that year. Avenging their Euro heartache, England defeated Spain to win the FIFA U17 World Cup in India. Foden scored twice in the 5-2 final victory and was named Player of the Tournament. The nation's excitement in this emerging generation of gifted players was palpable, and expectations of the City midfielder were suddenly sky high.

"I don't think he's ever been bothered by all the attention that surrounds him, and that's one of his special traits," says Mark Allen, City's former academy director who signed Foden to his first professional contract. "Phil Foden is exactly the same as a 20-year-old as he was as a ten-year-old. He just plays for the enjoyment and the love of the game. He shows it every time he takes to the field."

★

Foden's love of the game can be better characterised as an obsession. He fills every spare moment with impromptu practice. He has a 3G pitch in his back garden. Visitors to his house are escorted to the kitchen where he gauges their opinion on his latest ball-juggling tricks. He rarely settles for simply walking around his home, preferring instead to dribble a small ball and nutmeg family members.

He has always been this way. At airports during trips abroad for youth tournaments, his team-mates would spend their pocket money on duty-free hauls of giant Toblerones and bags of

**Rising stars...Foden (R) on England U17 duty with (L-R) George McEachran, Joel Latibeaudiere, Jonathan Panzo, Jadon Sancho, Angel Gomes and Timothy Eyoma**

sweets; Foden would seek out a sponge ball so he could practise in his room. The night after the U12 tournament in Madrid, scout Stewart Thompson was startled by a thudding noise emanating from the hotel corridor – "Phil, you need to go to bed," he said after finding Foden dribbling through the hallway.

"He's always doing extra," says Gareth Taylor, who coached Foden at U16 level. "You always see him out, last player on the pitch, practising his shooting, practising his free kicks, practising his skill."

Foden was first a matchday mascot when he was seven years old. He walked out at the Etihad holding Martin Petrov's hand – his favourite player, Micah Richards, had already been taken – and fired pre-match shots at Joe Hart's goal before a 1-0 City win over Southampton on Bonfire Night 2007. He was a regular at City's home arena soon after, serving as a ball boy at every possible opportunity. As much as he enjoyed the proximity to his heroes this allowed, Foden treated it as a recon mission, scrutinising the players and getting accustomed to the stadium.

"We used to talk about being on the pitch," remembers former youth team-mate Ed Francis. "It was, 'Who will be the first one to get there?' And he's gone and done that."

"He ended up being the oldest ball boy at the club," adds John, "because he just loved it. He didn't just go and be a ball boy; he was studying the game while he was watching it. He was mastering the game."

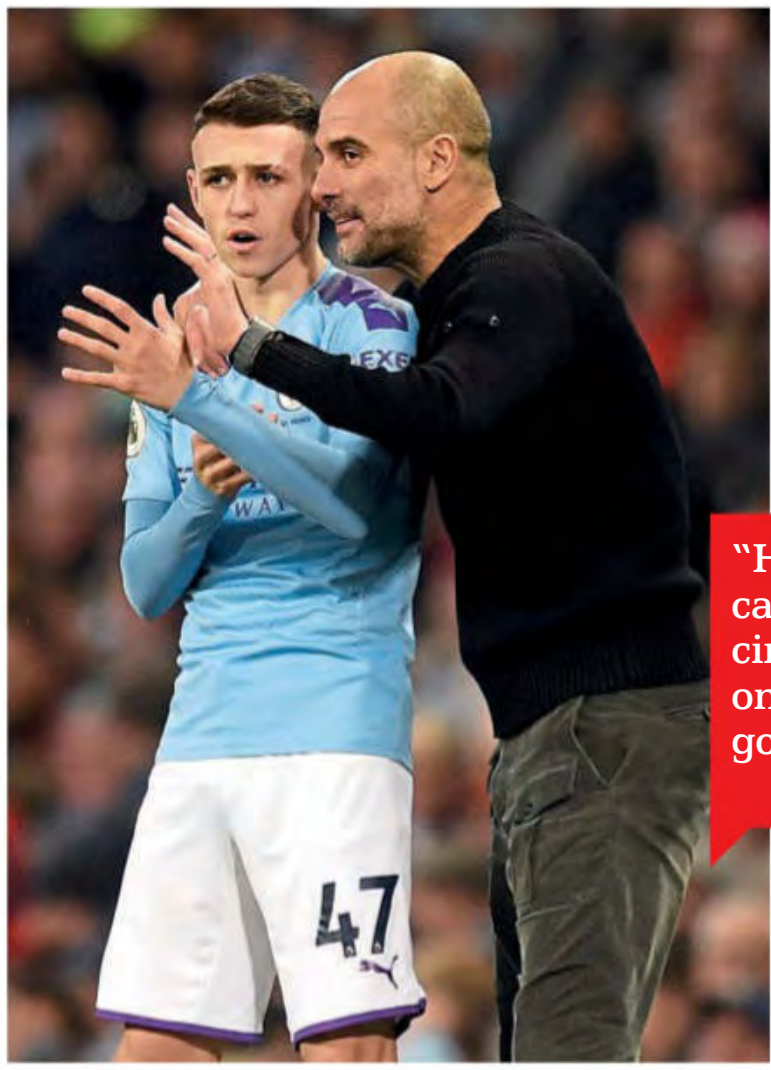
By the time of his competitive senior debut, a Champions League tie against Feyenoord in November 2017, the Etihad held little mystery for Foden; he felt he belonged. Even as he began to establish himself as a regular within Guardiola's squad, though, he never let that comfort breed complacency. The search for self-improvement continued, and, in the early months of 2020, it took him to the running track of the Liverpool Harriers athletics club.

"You reckon you can make me quicker?" Foden said in his first conversation with running coach Tony Clarke.

"What I put into Phil was new biomechanical movements, making his stride more efficient," explains Clarke. "In a 90-minute game of football, you can accelerate up to 1,000 times. If you can up that by one or two per cent, that's huge, and that's what Phil has done. He's a genius in taking on information and doing it. You tell him once and he knows it."

When lockdown rules permitted, Foden trained as often as three times

**Protégé...Pep Guardiola instructs Foden last season**



> "He is the only player that cannot be sold, under any circumstances. The only one. Not for €500m. Phil's going nowhere. Phil is City"
>
> **Pep Guardiola**

**Anfield missile... Foden fires in City's fourth goal against Liverpool**

**Awards...Foden collects his Player of the Tournament award from the U17 World Cup, next to Brazilian goalkeeper Gabriel Brazao and top scorer Rhian Brewster**

a week with Clarke. The coach would arrange cones on Foden's back-yard pitch to map out his corrected stride pattern, and the pair would meet at a nearby track for drills. At one such meeting, at a track in Macclesfield, a dozen young boys – one of whom was wearing a City shirt bearing Foden's name – were playing football when they spotted the Premier League star.

"Come on," Foden said at the end of the session, "let's go and play with them."

"I got thrown in goal," Clarke recalls. "An hour later, he was still playing football with them."

★

Foden was in Malaga, Spain, the day his world changed. He'd been selected to represent England at the upcoming European U19 Championship in the summer of 2018. At a squad meet-up in La Manga ahead of the tournament, Foden was in the lobby of the team hotel when he took a phone call from his long-time partner, Becca. She was pregnant, she told him. Foden, at 18, was to be a father.

"He just couldn't believe it," says Bolton, who was also part of the England squad. "I don't think he'd seen it coming, but he was happy."

Foden, in the end, didn't participate in the Euros, but he had little time to stew on the earth-shaking news – he pulled out of the squad in favour of a full pre-season with City's first team. Those close to Foden credit the support of his family with his ability to maintain focus following the January 2019 birth of his son, Ronnie, and through his early years of fatherhood.

The Fodens are described unanimously as "close-knit". The City midfielder is one of six siblings. His two young sisters are close to Ronnie's age, and growing up Foden doted on his younger brother, Kenzie. "Every time we travelled anywhere, when we stopped on our way back, he always bought a toy for his little brother," says former U15 coach Richard Brown. "He always talked about his brother."

Foden wears the number 47 for City as a tribute to his grandfather, Walter, who died at that age. He would, however, consider the number ten, were it to become available, as it corresponds with the date of his grandad's death. And close family bonds – with parents Phil and Claire in particular – were key to helping Foden recover and learn from the most testing moment of his young career.

Just two days after he made his senior England debut in a Nations League win against Iceland, Foden and Manchester United striker Mason Greenwood were expelled from the squad. The pair had invited four women to their hotel room, in contravention of coronavirus rules. The resultant media outcry was Foden's first experience with negative press. And while, according to those close to the family, his parents expressed a deep disappointment in his indiscretion, their support has been crucial in ensuring his humility and on-field focus never slipped. Two months later, recalled by Gareth Southgate, Foden registered his first England goals – a Wembley brace, fittingly, against Iceland.

"If you're fortunate enough to meet his parents," Taylor says, "they don't get carried away; they constantly challenge him."

"He's so proud of his roots," John adds of the football prodigy who still views fishing trips with his dad as the perfect respite. "His feet are still on the ground."

★

When Jason Wilcox, now City's academy director, was in charge of an U13 group that included Foden, he gathered his players in a meeting room at the club's old Platt Lane academy site. The coach asked each boy about his ambitions.

"They were saying, 'I want to have a big house, I want to drive a fancy car,'" Wilcox remembers. "Phil's answer was, 'I want to be a Manchester City legend.'"

Foden doesn't celebrate his 21st birthday until late May. Legendary status, at this stage, is some way off. But, with more than 100 appearances already to his name, he's on the right track. "We didn't give Phil Foden a new contract by accident," Guardiola said in October 2019, referring to the player signing a long-term deal in December 2018. "And I'll tell you this: he is the only player that cannot be sold, under any circumstances. The only one. Not for €500m. Phil's going nowhere. Phil is City."

In February, City recorded their first win at Anfield since 2003, emphatically thumping champions Liverpool 4-1. Foden was instrumental, providing an assist and scoring a stunning goal, driving into the box and flashing a left-footed shot beyond goalkeeper Alisson and into the top corner.

Luke Bolton, currently on loan with Dundee United, was watching on TV. "I was with my flatmate up here," he says. "We were like, 'Wow.' But I wasn't surprised. I've seen him do that millions of times in training. I think he's going to be contending for Ballon d'Ors. Him, Jadon [Sancho], I think they're up there with the Mbappes of the world, without doubt."

The week after his star showing against Liverpool, Foden went cycling near his home. Despite the fact he was wearing a helmet and, due to coronavirus guidelines, a mask, passers-by still recognised and greeted him. "It's the first time I've really noticed people recognising me," Foden told a friend days later, still surprised at the level of his fame.

Nine years on, Ravanelli's prediction has come true: Foden is unquestionably a special talent, even if, as he is perfectly aware, he has much left to achieve in the game. If he is to fulfil his ultimate ambition, he'd better get used to being recognised.

"His goal," says Wilcox, "is to be the best player in the world."

eye witness

Cameron Wilson reports

CHINA

# Closed for business

## Chinese Super League prepares to get under way without its reigning champions

Confusion and disarray cloud Chinese football ahead of the 2021 season. Jiangsu FC, formerly Jiangsu Suning, won their maiden Chinese Super League (CSL) title last November thanks to an abbreviated competition format in response to the pandemic. But barely four months later, the side has "ceased operations" following withdrawal of their parent company due to financial difficulties.

Even in a country known for its chaotic football system, the news that the 2015 Chinese FA Cup winners would be disbanded and not defend its CSL crown, came as a shock to many. At the time of writing, the team has yet to officially be wound-up, but this is widely believed to be a formality. Owners Suning – part of a sprawling conglomerate with interests in retail, real estate, broadcasting, as well as

Closed...Jiangsu's training ground

a controlling stake in Internazionale – had tried to offload Jiangsu to any buyer willing to take on the club's estimated $90 million debt. However, with the CSL boom years apparently now over, there were no takers. The CFA issued a terse statement lamenting Jiangsu's passing, which, in a somewhat tone-deaf manner, went on to thank Suning for its contributions to developing the Chinese game, sparking much derision amongst fans in general.

The team, based in Nanjing, capital of one of China's wealthiest provinces, Jiangsu, attracted global headlines during the boom years of the CSL, splashing astronomical fees on the likes of Brazilian midfielders Ramires and Alex Teixeira, and even coming close to signing Gareth Bale in 2019.

The disappearance of Jiangsu, with its 27-year history stretching back to the beginning of professionalism of the Chinese game in 1994, is a serious blow. Consistently one of the best-supported teams in China with crowds averaging around 30,000, and often filling the 60,000-seater Nanjing Olympic Sports Centre for big matches, the club's support was known for its regular huge tifo displays, which often featured amusing risqué images and profane language.

The Jiangsu support's intense dislike for its regional neighbours Shanghai Shenhua made the "Yangtze Delta Derby" one of the most heated matches on the CSL calendar, with violence not uncommon when the teams met. Indeed, their rivalry has been a rich source of Chinese football lore over the years. The bitterness manifested itself most famously in 2013 when enraged Jiangsu fans stormed a TV studio inside their home stadium and assaulted a Shanghai football pundit who had wildly celebrated a Shenhua goal against the home team during a live broadcast. However, observers were left to lament the loss of the rivalry's contribution to the already barren field of Chinese football culture, not to mention the embarrassment to the CSL as a whole of not having its champion defend its title.

Whilst the seemingly overnight disappearance of the CSL's champion club may appear bewildering to some outsiders, its demise takes place against an identifiable backdrop of challenging circumstances for football in China. And while the pandemic may have been a catalyst for Jiangsu's downfall, the root causes go far deeper than the events of the past 12 months.

The main purpose for big business to get involved in football in China is to score political brownie points. It is widely understood that there is little money to be made by running football clubs in China. Just a cursory glance at the vast sums spent by leading CSL clubs on top player salaries and transfer fees over the past few seasons, coupled with the fact that a CSL season ticket averages around £70-100, strongly suggest financial profit is not an attraction.

Given the government's strong presence in all significant aspects of Chinese life, little of consequence is possible without their tacit or outright support. Therefore, when the government announced a major plan to completely overhaul Chinese football back in 2015, the major investment from business that followed was not a coincidence. Indeed, corporate bankrolling of Chinese football dates back to the inception of the professional game in 1994 and is nothing new. But previously, investments would be done on a more local or regional scale, foreign player purchases would be more modest, and the whole model relatively more sustainable. But when noted football fan Xi Jinping rose to president in 2012, corporate interest rose further – the well-connected chairmen of real estate giants such as Greenland and Evergrande saw which way the political winds were blowing and invested in Guangzhou and Shanghai Shenhua, eager to curry political favour. When the 2015 football reform plan made the political connection more explicit, corporate interest – and the amount of money being pumped in – exploded. It did not take a business Nostradamus to see that an unsustainable bubble was forming.

**Star man... Alex Teixeira reportedly turned down Liverpool to join Jiangsu for around €50m**

A range of factors made the bursting of the bubble so spectacular. Over the past couple of seasons the CFA has introduced salary and transfer fee caps, reflecting government displeasure at the unsustainability of the CSL. In China, the official focus is very much on the

CSL champions... the Jiangsu players celebrate with their trophy in November

national team, and the conclusion that the money-burning period of the last half-decade did nothing to improve the on-going underachievement on the international stage has become impossible to avoid. The lack of results brought into question what conglomerates were actually bringing to the game, in turn affecting how much political capital they could accrue.

The relative weakness of football in China means it badly struggles to remain unaffected by broader issues affecting the rest of the country. The pandemic, and economic difficulties caused by recent international trade tensions, have led to both government and big business reassessing their priorities. Football has been knocked even further down the pecking order. Besides, the sport was not even as high up on the to-do list of China's football-loving president to begin with, contrary to popular belief.

What may have been the last straw for Jiangsu was a new rule requiring clubs to have "neutral names": that is, titles without any element from their parent company or other sponsor. A well-meaning and arguably much-needed ruling to help develop Chinese football culture, its implementation was ham-fisted and adds to the confusion surrounding the new season. Some clubs, such as Guangzhou Evergrande and Guangzhou R&F quickly switched to Guangzhou FC and Guangzhou City respectively.

However, Shanghai SIPG's fans publicly protested that their new title Shanghai "Port" contained elements of their parent company's name, whilst an ownership reshuffle was necessary for Beijing Guoan to keep their title unchanged as the rule was that corporate elements could only be retained if there was no longer any active connection with that corporation. Ironically, despite the rule being intended to stop clubs constantly moving city and changing name, several clubs had to do just that. Henan Jianye – which had never changed its name once since professionalisation in 1994, became Henan Songshan Longmen, and Shijiazhuang Everbright in Hebei province moved to a city in the same province to become Cangzhou Mighty Lions.

**Whilst the seemingly overnight disappearance of the CSL's champion club may appear bewildering to some outsiders, its demise takes place against an identifiable backdrop of challenging circumstances for football in China**

What exactly teams will be called is just one of many factors which would normally be taken for granted but remain uncertain ahead of kick-off. Indeed, even the start date of the league is yet to be confirmed. At the time of writing, it is hoped CSL 2021 will get underway on April 20, but that is not certain, nor is exactly where matches will be played. The league plans to use a similar format to last season – splitting the 16-team league into two groups of eight, each based in two cities playing all their games at one stadium, before progressing to a knockout stage to determine the championship and relegation places. An extended transfer window due to the delayed start of the league means squads are not yet settled, and even which teams will play in the league is not yet set. The fate of Jiangsu, and Tianjin Teda who have befallen a similar ownership misfortune, are not yet settled. Zhejiang Pro of China's second tier could be one of the teams to fill any gap.

Regrettably, football clubs in China have been dropping like flies in recent years. When the dust finally settles, it is likely some 15 clubs from all three of China's professional divisions will have disappeared in the past 12 months, in addition to five casualties the previous year. These include storied names such as Liaoning FC – Asian Club Championship winners in 1990 – and Yanbian FC, one of the country's oldest clubs and a cultural gem in that it was centred around China's ethnic Korean population in the north east of the country. This would be an enormous loss in any circumstance, but in China, where football history and culture struggle to grow to support the game, the loss is keenly felt. Proponents of this mass cull of football institutions argue that clubs were not being run sustainably and that those without football's best interests would be forced out. Others pointed to the fact that it was not necessary for so many long-standing clubs to die for this to happen. As always, it's the fans in Chinese football who are left to mourn and ponder the sport's future.

Loyal fans...Jiangsu were one of the best-supported clubs in China

# eyewitness

Lukas Vrablik reports

CZECH REPUBLIC

## Slavia Prague make their mark

Slavia's bosses could only laugh. At the end of August 2019, Slavia Prague were drawn into a Champions League group with Barcelona, Internazionale and Borussia Dortmund. Tomas Syrovatka, the club vice-chairman, burst out laughing. The so-called "group of death" came just four years after the club had narrowly escaped bankruptcy.

In the end, Slavia, described as the group's minnow, were far from pushovers. In the first game, they drew 1-1 at the San Siro only after a stoppage-time equaliser for the home side. At the end of October, they unluckily lost at home to Barcelona (1-2), only to draw away (0-0). Two points out of six games: hardly a miracle, but it was definitely a Czech champion punching above its weight.

It was proof of a good strategy by

**Rising star... Abdallah Sima**

Influential...Tomas Soucek on Champions League duty for Slavia

Slavia, a club with limited experience in European football. The season before, they were beaten by Chelsea in the Europa League quarter-finals, and made it to the UEFA Cup semi-finals in 1996. They made it to the Champions League group stage in 2007-08, but after that things started to go wrong.

Financial troubles, mounting debts and mismanagement sent the club spiralling out of control. They almost missed out on obtaining their league licence for 2011-12, and came very close to bankruptcy in the summer of 2015. As their rivals Sparta Prague and the newly-emerged Viktoria Plzen came to dominate Czech football, Slavia looked a shadow of their former selves.

In 2015, their saviour came in the form of Chinese conglomerate CEFC China Energy. They appointed Jaroslav Tvrdik as president, a former minister in the government of Milos Zeman, the country's current president (who, incidentally, has been criticised by opponents for his closeness to China). In 2018, the club changed hands again, this time to another Chinese company, Sinobo Group, after whom the club stadium is named.

Tvrdik remained in charge, overseeing remarkable success. Since his arrival, Slavia have won league titles in 2017, 2019 and 2020, with another likely to follow in 2021.

His best decision was probably the appointment of coach Jindrich Trpisovsky. The Czech has created a functioning collective, able to fight and earn good results against bigger clubs. What Slavia lack in individual quality, they make up for with fighting spirit, high pressing, great counter-attacks and willingness to run. Trpisovsky's energetic style has drawn comparisons to Jurgen Klopp.

His predecessor, Dusan Uhrin Jr, says: "Slavia play all-round football and they can run. Their pressing is very good, they come very closely to their opponents and usually manage to get back into defence quickly." The weakness he sees is that Slavia can get exposed at the back at times, which cost them in some European games. "In the Czech league, they are better than anyone, because they have great players and manage to win balls in the opponents' half."

Trpisovsky is football-mad. In 2013, he was coach of SK Horni Mecholupy, a third-tier side. Before that, coaching wasn't enough for him to earn a living, so he was still employed as a restaurant manager. He would get up at four o'clock every morning, and spend his days between work and the training ground. After leading Viktoria Zizkov in the second division, he got a job in the top flight with Slovan Liberec and, in December 2017, became Slavia coach.

"He spends 15 or 16 hours with football every day," David Cermak, a journalist for *MF Dnes*, says. "He watches videos of opponent's games and then prepares his players. Even when they play against a small team in the Czech cup, he still brings videos for his players and shows them strengths and weaknesses of the team."

It was during his spell at Viktoria Zizkov that Trpisovsky discovered the player that would become crucial to him: Tomas Soucek. The midfielder came on loan from Slavia, where he was unable to break into the first team. The pair linked up for another loan at Liberec, and when Trpisovsky took charge of Slavia, he built the team around Soucek.

The midfielder has been one of the stars behind Slavia's success and remains connected to the club, in spite of his move to West Ham United in January 2020. After their victory against Leicester City in this season's Europa League, players celebrated on the pitch and one of the staff members showed Soucek on FaceTime wearing a Slavia shirt.

**What Slavia lack in individual quality, they make up for with fighting spirit, high pressing, great counter-attacks and willingness to run. Trpisovsky's energetic style has drawn comparisons to Jurgen Klopp**

A sensible transfer policy has played a key role in Slavia's improvement. Thanks to their Chinese investors, they are able to invest in players both from the Czech league and neighbouring countries. Through the use of data, they unearthed the likes of Cameroon centre-back Michael Ngadeu-Ngadjui from Romanian side Botosani in 2016, later selling him to Gent for almost four times as much as they paid for him.

Coach... Jindrich Trpisovsky

Clash...Glen Kamara and Ondrej Kudela

Feisty...Kemar Roofe had already been sent off for this challenge

Slavia know that they can't compete with the riches of Europe's elite, but they try not to panic in the transfer market and sell at the right moment. In 2020, Slavia sold Tomas Soucek to West Ham United for £19 million, in a transfer that broke the Czech league's record. Slavia previously refused lucrative offers for Soucek from Italy, as they expected the Champions League campaign to push his value higher. They were right to think so, and West Ham also bought right-back Vladimir Coufal for £5.4m in October. Thanks to this season's strong showing in Europe, they expect to earn more on their players.

"Soucek is a footballing robot," said Trpisovsky. "We have to develop more players like him."

This approach will be useful in upcoming transfer windows, with offers from bigger leagues expected to come in for their new stars. 19-year-old Senegalese striker Abdallah Sima, who joined Slavia from Taborsko in the Czech second tier, has been linked to several Premier League clubs. "In his case, I believe he has potential for Premier League. The only question remains if he would be ready to manage it already," Cermak says.

Sima has been one of the stars of this season's Europa League campaign, scoring goals in a run that has seen the Czech underdogs beat Bayer Leverkusen, Nice, Leicester and Rangers before meeting Arsenal in the quarter-finals.

Their campaign, however, was undoubtedly overshadowed by the accusations of racism that followed their clash with the Scottish champions, when Rangers' Finnish midfielder Glen Kamara accused Slavia's centre-back Ondrej Kudela of a racist slur.

It was in the 87th minute. Slavia were leading 2-0 and Rangers were already down to nine men after red cards for Kemar Roofe and Leon Balogun. Victory for the Czechs was beyond doubt. After a foul in Rangers' half, Kudela walked up to Kamara, covered his mouth and shouted something in Kamara's ear.

Clubs have different versions of the story. Kamara alleges that Kudela called him "a f****** monkey" – which was confirmed by the Rangers boss Steven Gerrard. "I 100 per cent believe him, what he's saying in terms of the accusation. Other players around heard it," said Gerrard. "It's over to UEFA now, and I just hope it doesn't get brushed under the carpet."

> "It's over to UEFA now, and I just hope it doesn't get brushed under the carpet"
>
> **Steven Gerrard, Rangers manager**

The official statement released by Slavia denied the allegations and claimed Kudela had said: "you f****** guy," before praising the defender for his leadership on the pitch and popularity among team-mates and fans.

Head-to-head... Gerrard and Trpisovsky

As Kamara and his team-mates tried to report the slur to the referee, chaos ensued, resulting in yellow cards for Kudela and Rangers captain Connor Goldson.

"UEFA will be dealing with everything that happened in Glasgow," Slavia stated. "We believe they will investigate it properly and we will respect their decision."

Sadly, it is not the first accusation that has been made against the club.

In 2019, Inter's Romelu Lukaku complained of racist chants from Slavia's fans. "I hope that UEFA now do something about it, because the whole stadium did it when we scored the first goal, and that's not good for the people watching this game," he said after the Champions League group stage game.

Lukaku's allegation came just weeks after Barcelona defender Nelson Semedo had claimed something similar, and in 2019 Slavia had a stand in their stadium closed after racist chants towards Sparta Prague midfielder Guelor Kanga. In both cases, Slavia rejected the allegations.

Yet clearly, the club has a problem. The day after the Rangers game, one of their fan groups posted an image on social media of a banner containing the words: "Kamara – just a n*****".

"I am terribly ashamed of the content of the photo published by some radical fans," said Tvrdik, while the Slavia website was quick to post a statement saying that both the club and its other fan groups denounce these fans.

It is a stain that will be hard to wash off. Whatever strides forward that Slavia have made in terms of their football and their finances, in other ways they still have a very long way to go.

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eye witness

Tom Kundert reports

PORTUGAL

# Amorim's Sporting miracle

## Sporting have returned to the top of Portuguese football

On May 15, 2018, 50 of Sporting's own ultras, furious at an end-of-season collapse, charged the club's training complex and violently attacked the players and coaching staff, precipitating a mass exodus of first-teamers in the summer. That fateful afternoon is often referred to as the darkest day in the club's 114-year history.

Less than three years later, Sporting Clube de Portugal are in rude health. After going ten points clear of their rivals with a dozen matches remaining, the Lions are set to win a first championship title since 2002. Even allowing for the global pandemic's peculiar warping of reality as we had previously known it, the turnaround in fortunes at the famous old club from Lisbon is truly astonishing.

The unexpected nature of Sporting's title charge cannot be over-emphasised. Benfica and Porto have shared the previous 18 Primeira Liga titles between them. Prior to the start of the 2020-21 season, Benfica re-hired coach Jorge Jesus, under whom they had enjoyed tremendous success in his first spell, and spent an unprecedented €100 million on squad strengthening. Porto, meanwhile, had reignited the fiercely competitive spirit so characteristic of the club and their coach Sergio Conceicao, winning the double in the previous season in fine style. Some suggested there should be a recalibration of the *Tres Grandes* moniker used to describe Portugal's three most successful clubs. The Big Three was now the Big Two.

Furthermore, under rookie coach Ruben Amorim, Sporting's signings in the summer transfer market had not exactly enthused the fan base. While Benfica's chase of ex-PSG striker Edinson Cavani stole the headlines, Sporting bought Pedro Goncalves, Nuno Santos and Bruno Tabata from some of Portugal's lesser lights, each costing around €5m. Experienced Spanish goalkeeper Antonio Adan and Moroccan defender Zouhair Feddal were drafted in, with the rest of the squad bolstered by recalled loanees and loan signings.

With Amorim declaring his intention to fill the remaining gaps in the squad by leaning on the club's youth products, Sporting fans looked at the pre-season preparations with the melancholy air of those who had become accustomed to living in the shadow of others. An early exit from Europe after a 4-1 capitulation at home to Austrian outfit LASK Linz apparently confirmed Sporting's squad would be incapable of competing for trophies.

And then it happened.

The Green and Whites suddenly started winning with unfamiliar regularity. On the very few occasions they did not obtain the three points, they did not lose. They rarely played brilliantly, they often relied on late goals, but the victories kept on coming. At the time of writing, Sporting had not tasted defeat in the first 24 league matches, a club record.

Built on the foundation of a rock-solid defence – just 11 goals conceded in 24 matches – half the number of the next best defence, the seemingly motley crew of

**Ruben Amorim... the mastermind of Sporting's success**

Celebrating... Amorim celebrates with his players after winning the League Cup

summer acquisitions has been moulded as if by some magical alchemy into a perfectly functioning unit. This Sporting team is an archetypal example of the whole being greater than the sum of its parts. The 3-4-3 formation is set in stone no matter how strong or how weak the opposition, meaning every player knows exactly their role. When injury or suspension necessitates a change to a regular starter, there is no drop-off in the solidity of performance.

The alchemist in question is 36-year-old coach Ruben Amorim. The ability to get the very best out of the players available is the surest sign of a top-quality manager, and Amorim passes the test with flying colours. It may be too early to anoint him as the next big thing in Portuguese coaching, but his start to life in the dugout could not have gone any better.

Starting out at lower-league club Casa Pia, Amorim was quickly snapped up by Braga to train their B team, and three months later was promoted to the head coach of the first team when Ricardo Sa Pinto was sacked. Amorim's record was nothing short of sensational, winning ten out of 13 matches including shock victories over Porto (twice), Sporting (twice) and Benfica, lifting the Portuguese League Cup in the process.

So impressed was Sporting president Frederico Varandas that he deemed it appropriate to pay Braga €10m to activate Amorim's release clause. The fee made Amorim the third-most expensive "coach transfer" in football history, despite the fact he had only a couple of months of top-flight experience.

One of the first battles Amorim faced upon signing for Sporting in March 2020 was to convince the fans he was the right man for the job. This was no easy task considering his strong association with bitter cross-town rivals Benfica, where he spent most of his playing career. But Amorim's impact in Lisbon has been every bit as spectacular as his Braga tenure. Having lifted the League Cup again, increased the profile and value of a host of players, and all but guaranteed the financial windfall brought by qualification to the Champions League, that €10m transfer fee has proven to be money wisely spent.

In addition to the phenomenal results achieved under his stewardship, Amorim has recuperated an essential facet of Sporting's very DNA. During the lean years, the success-starved fans could at least point to one aspect of their club with pride. Sporting's world-renowned Alcochete academy churned out the highest quality of players with startling consistency. It remains the only club to produce two Ballon d'Or winners in Luis Figo and Cristiano Ronaldo, and Portugal's 2016 European Championship success was largely built on talent coming out of Alcochete. Ten of the 14 players who appeared at the Euro 2016 final were Sporting products.

Silverware...Sporting won the Portuguese League Cup in January

However, in recent years the club had turned its back on the academy, overtaken by rivals Benfica and Porto in terms of nurturing elite young footballers. That changed with the appointment of Amorim. The young coach promised he would make use of the club's youth products and he has been true to his word. At the tail end of last season, Sporting often fielded

Key signing... Antonio Adan has been an ever-present in goal

Rising star... Nuno Mendes

> "My ambition is undimmed. The way ahead involves winning trophies and building something even greater. I'm very happy and enormously proud to be part of Sporting"
>
> **Ruben Amorim**

line-ups almost entirely comprising of inexperienced prospects, with Amorim using those games to evaluate which of the Alcochete youth were ready to contribute to the senior team.

The end result is a sizeable contribution from young Sporting players to this season's success. At just 18 years of age, wing-back Nuno Mendes is an automatic starter, one of the best performers in Portugal, let alone Sporting, and is set for a glittering career. Roving forward Tiago Tomas, also 18, and centre-back Goncalo Inacio, 19, have been mainstays in the first team, while forward Jovane Cabral and midfielders Daniel Braganca and Matheus Nunes have made telling contributions on a regular basis. Mendes and Tomas had not even been born the last time Sporting were champions of Portugal.

Thanks to Amorim's faith, Sporting's youth factory is in good shape again, ready to strengthen the first team on a regular basis.

Given Amorim's Midas touch, it came as no surprise when in early March Sporting announced his contract had been renewed. One year after originally signing on the dotted line, Amorim's wages were doubled, his contract extended until 2024 and the release clause increased to €30m.

"I feel at home here," said Amorim. "I've always said I took the right option. A lot has changed in this first year, but there is a lot still to do. My ambition is undimmed. The way ahead involves winning trophies and building something even greater. I'm very happy and enormously proud to be part of Sporting."

Should Amorim continue his success, it is inevitable that that ambition will sooner or later entice him away from the Portuguese capital. Sporting fans will be hoping that if and when that happens, he will have laid the foundations for Sporting to continue to prosper and definitively overthrow their secondary role of recent years in the Portuguese football food chain.

## UNSHAKEABLE TOGETHERNESS

The collective effort trumping the individual has been a running theme of Sporting's season. In December, after a controversial draw away to Famalicao left Sporting furious at the officials, Amorim uttered a phrase that has become a rallying call among the squad: "*Onde vai um, vão todos*" – where one goes, we all go. The motto has been repeated ceaselessly in post-match interviews and on social media.

The fact there are few standout stars has also helped foster an indomitable spirit of togetherness, no doubt responsible for a remarkable series of late goals that have turned impending defeats into draws or draws into wins. By early March, goals scored after the 80th minute had earned Sporting 15 extra points.

### GOALS SCORED AFTER 80 MINUTES AND FINAL RESULT

| | |
|---|---|
| 2-2 v *Porto (h)* | **87'** |
| 2-1 v *Santa Clara (a)* | **81'** |
| 3-1 v *Gil Vicente (h)* | **82' 84' 96'** |
| 1-0 v *Farense (h)* | **91'** |
| 1-0 v *Benfica (h)* | **92'** |
| 2-1 v *Gil Vicente (a)* | **83' 91'** |
| 1-0 v *Tondela (a)* | **82'** |

## NO BRUNO, NO PROBLEM

While Sporting's record-breaking season has been a truly collective effort, the outstanding contribution of attacking midfielder Pedro Goncalves cannot be overlooked.

Signed to fill a massive Bruno Fernandes-shaped hole in Sporting's midfield, the 22-year-old has been exceptional, replicating the prodigious goals output of the now-Manchester United player. "Pote" as he is nicknamed, is top scorer in the Portuguese league, averaging three goals every four games.

Pote was part of the Portuguese invasion at Wolves as a youth player, but returned to Portugal because he was homesick. Should he maintain his fabulous form, a return to a higher-profile league is likely.

# EURO 2020
## ONES TO WATCH

**Nick Bidwell** casts his eyes over the players to watch out for at this summer's delayed European Championship

### EDUARDO CAMAVINGA

**(France)**
As he proved when netting a fine goal in only his second international appearance for "*Les Bleus*" – a sublime over-the-shoulder flick in a thumping 7-1 victory over Ukraine six months ago – 18-year-old Rennes midfield prodigy Camavinga is a special talent, indeed, a teenager destined to go all the way to the top.

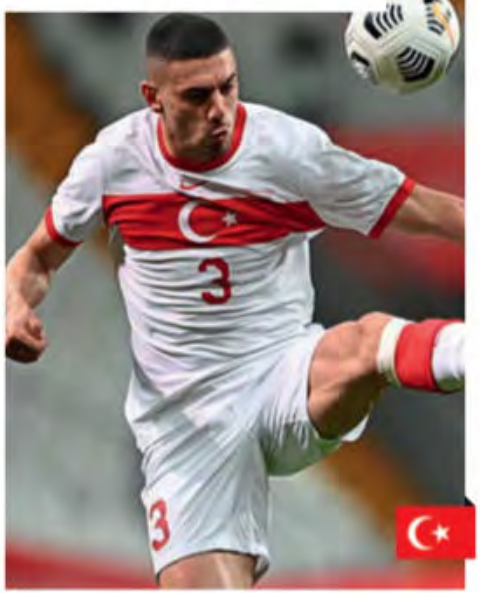
*Les Bleus* head coach Didier Deschamps is the dictionary definition of conservatism, never one to gamble unless he absolutely has to. But even the risk-averse Deschamps found himself unable to resist Eduardo's charms, bringing the midfielder into the national team fold as quickly as possible. Camavinga, only 17 years and 11 months old when making his full international debut last autumn in a Nations League tie versus Croatia, is very much a history-maker – France's youngest debutant since 1914.

"It's not just a case of his enthusiasm; in spite of his young age, Eduardo has the capacity to perform to a high standard," gushed Deschamps last year. "Generally speaking, we first and foremost expect young players to bring lots of life and energy to the table. He can do things which other youngsters do less well, notably his distribution, ball control, movements, the quality of his passing. What's more, he's very versatile and has a strong all-round game. He has everything going for him. He has a bright future."

The smart money says that this will be his last season in Brittany with Rennes. More or less every top European club currently has his agent Jonathan Barnett (who most notably has Gareth Bale on his books) on speed dial, and Euro 2020 will hand the prodigy the most prominent of shop windows to showcase his incredible talent.

For quite some time, Real Madrid were thought to be in pole position for his signature. However, according to reports from France and Spain, a more realistic destination is the Premier League, where Chelsea or Manchester United are ready to lay down serious amounts of money. An outstanding Euros could see the rumoured figure (currently €50m) climb considerably higher.

### MERIH DEMIRAL



**(Turkey)**
Tremendously combative Juventus centre-back, who has bounced back well after tearing cruciate ligaments early in 2020. Turkey coach Senol Gunes puts a premium on a granite defence, one which does not make unenforced errors. Demiral, 23, fits that bill. His Champions League experience should be a boon for the Turks too.

### ELJIF ELMAS

**(North Macedonia)**
Apart from his silky technique, the 21-year-old Napoli midfielder owes much of his good standing in the European game to his great versatility, to his capacity to deliver in any number of roles: as a "false nine", playmaker, box-to-box operative or on the left side of midfield. Can cause damage a plenty with his dribbling raids.

## DUJE CALETA-CAR

**(Croatia)**
After a bit-part brief in his country's march to the 2018 World Cup final – a start in the group phase win over Iceland was his sole piece of the action – the Marseille defender has a considerably more active role for the Croats these days. The 24-year-old centre-back is by far the team's most accomplished defender and, with him in the line-up, the men in the famous red-and-white checks have a much more balanced look. In a team awash with attacking-third brilliance, he is the guarantor of the side's rear-guard solidity.

Bought by Marseille from leading Austrian side RB Salzburg in the summer of 2018, he initially struggled to fit in at the Provencal outfit, red-carded against Lyon in one of his very first matches, ball-watching and taking a good six months to hold down a regular place. Many Marseille supporters were quick to brand him a €19 million waste of money, but showing great character, he dug in and proved them wrong, forcing himself back into the starting line-up and making himself undroppable.

He was particularly impressive for Marseille in the 2019-20 campaign, playing a key role as the southern French club secured the runners-up spot in Ligue 1. This was a Caleta-Car far removed from the hesitant, careless youngster, who looked like a fish out of water on arriving at the Stade Velodrome. Here was a centre-back with all the required qualities: the physical presence, strength in the air, powers of anticipation, comfort on the ball and offensive set-piece threat. Crucial to his marked improvement in France was Marseille assistant coach Ricardo Carvalho, who, of course, was a top-drawer stopper during his playing days for Porto, Chelsea and Portugal.

Caleta-Car recently came close to moving to Merseyside. Desperate for central defensive reinforcements, Liverpool tried to sign him in the January transfer window only for Marseille to nix the deal.

## NICO ELVEDI

**(Switzerland)**
Fast-improving Monchengladbach central defender whose strong work over the last couple of seasons has reportedly caught the eye of Bayern Munich and a string of Premier League outfits. Quick over the ground, resilient and precise in his distribution. With Gladbach since 2015, joining them from FC Zurich.

## PATRIK HROSOVSKY

**(Slovakia)**
The Genk defensive midfielder arguably is the most underrated player in the Slovak side. He effectively is the glue which holds the unit together, tactically very aware, industrious, good technically and able to turn his hand to multiple briefs. A real leader of men, he played for Viktoria Plzen in his homeland before moving to Belgium in 2019.

## MEMPHIS DEPAY

**(Netherlands)**
Forced to the sidelines for six months after tearing his ACL late in 2019, the maverick Dutch striker would have been, in normal circumstances, a European Championship write-off. But with the COVID-19 pandemic rearing its ugly head and UEFA compelled to postpone the continental finals for 12 months, the 27-year-old Lyon striker now has a second bite at the cherry.

The Netherlands powers-that-be can only be relieved that the Euro 2020 finals were put back. Take the marauding and bullish Depay out of the team and you remove the vast bulk of the "*Oranje*" firepower. With all respect to the likes of fellow national team front-men Donyell Malen (PSV), Luuk de Jong (Sevilla) and Wout Weghorst (Wolfsburg), they are not remotely of the same line-leading calibre. Prior to his injury, Depay was an irresistible XXL figure for Netherlands, scoring six goals in qualification as well as providing eight assists. He was the heartbeat of the team and remains so to this day. If Depay is on song, invariably the Dutch hit the right notes.

Somewhat ominously, new Dutch boss Frank de Boer does not agree with predecessor Ronald Koeman that Depay should automatically play in his best position through the middle. In a couple of recent Nations League fixtures, De Boer switched Depay to the left flank, allocating the main striker role to De Jong. De Boer thinks it makes for a better balance. As for Depay, he insists he has no problem with the change of role: "It feels familiar to me [out on the left]. It's not as though I've never played there. I can work in either position. I played with Luuk [de Jong] for a long time at PSV. We know each other well. I know how to connect with him and vice versa."

Apart from the collective mission of restoring *Oranje* pride after a few barren years, Memphis will be thinking along personal lines too. His contract with Lyon is drawing to a close and he has made no secret of his desire to move on. He will be spoilt for choice, with Barcelona, Juventus and a number of leading Premier League clubs thought to be keen on a "wages only" killing.

## GLEN KAMARA

**(Finland)**
After playing a preponderant role in Rangers' recent conquest of the Scottish Premiership, the cultured and athletic Finland midfield holder will be looking to keep up the good work on national team duty. A metronomic passer of the ball, he does the fine job of linking the play and setting a rhythm. Once at the Arsenal academy.

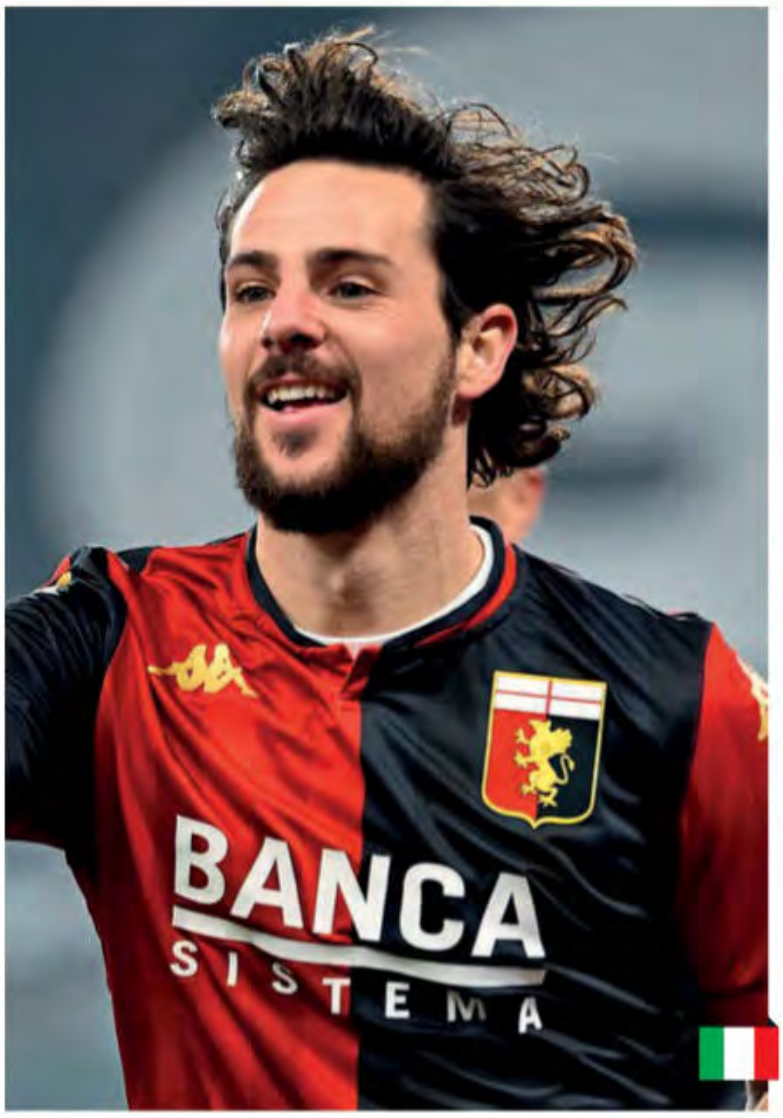
## ALEX KRAL

**(Czech Republic)**
Czech defensive midfielder and David Luiz lookalike who apparently has a number of top-flight English scouts running the rule over him. Currently featuring for Spartak Moscow in Russia, his stock in trade is his dynamism, drive, boundless energy and tough tackling. His country's most impressive performer at the 2017 European Under-19 finals.

## MATTIA DESTRO

**(Italy)**
While Lazio goal machine Ciro Immobile and Torino front-line hulk Andrea Belotti remain atop the "*Azzurri*" striking pecking order department, more and more Italian pundits are wondering out loud whether the time is right for a recall for the experienced Genoa hitman, who after several years of under-achievement, has suddenly re-emerged with all guns blazing. Should Italy coach Roberto Mancini need an impact substitute to call on in these finals, he could do far worse than summon Destro.

Now aged 30, Destro, who won the last of his eight international caps way back in November 2014, has been a one-man Serie A wrecking crew of late, netting no fewer than eight goals between December and late January. The archetypal penalty-box poacher, cunning and opportunistic, the former Siena, Milan, Roma and Bologna spearhead has been enjoying an Indian summer, playing with the freshness, hunger and verve which typified his play as a young gun many moons ago.




During his early days at Siena and Roma, he was regarded as one of the hottest properties in the country. Then, mysteriously and without warning, he lost his mojo, going from would-be ace to wandering journeyman. Most observers of the Italian scene had long counted him out. So what a surprise it has been to watch his recent renaissance, an upturn undoubtedly facilitated by a return to his old Genoa stomping ground, the club where he began his Serie A odyssey over a decade ago.

What's amazing is that after repeated countless setbacks at Milan and Bologna, he was still full of confidence and ambition at the start of this season. "The national team is not a closed chapter for me," he told the *Secolo XIX* newspaper. "I have played for Italy and I hope, who knows, to be able to do it again. The European Championship is coming up in June and it is a beautiful opportunity, but it all begins here in Genoa, with what I manage to do, to demonstrate on the pitch."

## ALEXANDER ISAK

**(Sweden)**
Still only 21 – though he seems to have been around for an age – the prolific Real Sociedad striker has come a long way since a much-publicised switch from AIK Solna to Dortmund in 2017 turned out to be a two-year mistake. In January 2017 he became the youngest ever goalscorer in the history of the Swedish national team (17 years, 113 days).

## ALBERT SAMBI LOKONGA

**(Belgium)**
In only his second season as a starter at Anderlecht, this elegant young midfielder can do no wrong at the moment, appointed club captain at the age of just 21 and often compared in style to Barcelona and Spain playmaker Sergio Busquets. With Axel Witsel likely to miss Euro 2020 through injury, Lokonga could get the replacement call.

## JOAO FELIX

**(Portugal)**
Since quitting Benfica for Atletico Madrid in the 2019 off-season for a whopping €126 million, the golden boy frontrunner has had his ups and downs at the Wanda Metropolitano, sometimes sublime and decisive, at other moments unconvincing and petulant. But there can be no denying that the 21-year-old is a rare talent and has the skills and vision to change a game at any given moment. With his vivid imagination, wonderful array of skills, and clever mobility, the "*Menino de Ouro*" makes it all look so effortless, and why wouldn't he rise to the occasion in the European finals? This is a stage made to measure for someone of his gifts.

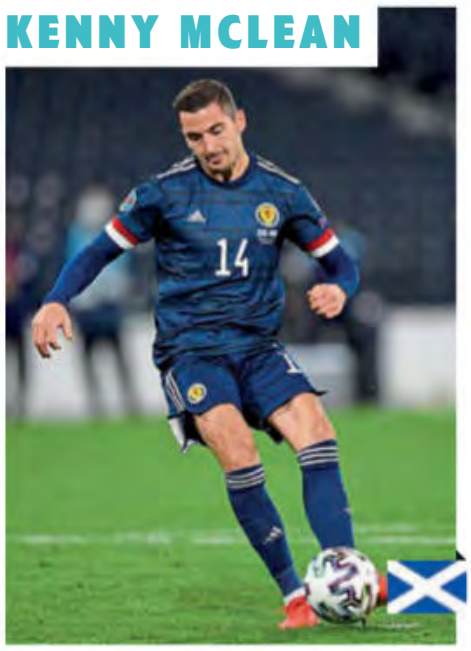
The competition for places in the Portuguese attack is arguably more intense than any other part of Europe. In the shape of the institution that is Cristiano Ronaldo, Joao Felix, Manchester City's Bernardo Silva, Eintracht Frankfurt marksman Andre Silva, Liverpool forward Diogo Jota, Wolves wingers Pedro Neto and Daniel Podence and Barcelona youngster Trincao, Portugal boast the ultimate well-stocked warehouse. Their coach Fernando Santos only has room for three of them and with Ronaldo occupying one berth, that means Felix can take nothing for granted.

The good news for the Atletico starlet is that for all Fernando Santos' innate caution, the Portugal boss has made a point of sticking by him in recent times. He started six of Portugal's eight fixtures in 2020, scoring three goals and setting up another. Whether used as a false nine or on the left side, he generally has looked the part. Fernando Santos clearly recognises what Felix has to offer as a difference-maker and flexible threat. Cristiano Ronaldo may no longer have the mobility, but he does have the experience, presence, marksmanship and the creative impulses of Felix to feed off. Given the freedom to roam laterally and vertically, Felix's magic touch could be Portugal's trump card as they seek to defend their title.

## JOAKIM MAEHLE

**(Denmark)**
Happy to play full-back on either flank, the 23-year-old Atalanta new recruit combines athleticism, pace and lashings of attacking adventure. Previously with Genk in Belgium, he was instrumental to their domestic league title success of 2018-19, racking up no fewer than ten assists and four goals. Cost Atalanta €10 million in January.

## KENNY MCLEAN



**(Scotland)**
In-form central midfielder currently in the best form of his career for high-flying English second-tier side Norwich City. Great heart and work rate, drives forward with purpose and extremely intelligent in his covering duties. Netted the winning penalty in the shootout victory over Israel in the play-offs.

## PHIL FODEN

**(England)**
Will England boss Gareth Southgate be bold and make use of the exciting young Manchester City midfielder at Euro 2020? Foden's experience with the Three Lions may be extremely limited, but there's a growing body of opinion on the Premier League circuit that the Stockport-born whizz kid would give a vital extra dimension to England's engine room. Whether used centrally, on the left or as floating centre-forward, 20-year-old Foden clearly is an outstanding prospect, one whose natural habitat is the highest level of the game.

More often than not this season, he has been a class apart for runaway Premier League leaders City, recording innumerable goals and assists across all competitions. He appears to have it all: brilliant technique in tight areas, that rare ability to glide past opponents, an eye for a killer pass, craft and cunning when working between the lines, energy, application and shooting power. An increasingly influential cog in a club side bang in form, he certainly is not short of confidence and there's every possibility the left-footer would bring that self-assurance and winning mentality to the national team.

The kid was just born to play football in the stratosphere. One only has to look at the exceptional performance he produced in City's 4-1 trouncing of Liverpool at Anfield in February. Poor Liverpool. They simply could not lay a glove on him, helpless to stop his driving runs, finesse, balance on the ball and smart end-product. The goal he scored, City's fourth on the night, was the cherry on the cake of a brilliant individual display.

Not so long ago, many pundits were screaming that he needed to leave the Etihad Stadium for more regular game-time, that City manager Pep Guardiola was holding him back. So much for that assessment. All in all, Pep has handled Foden's evolution with great care. He's brought him along slowly and English football should thank him for it.

## JOSE GAYA

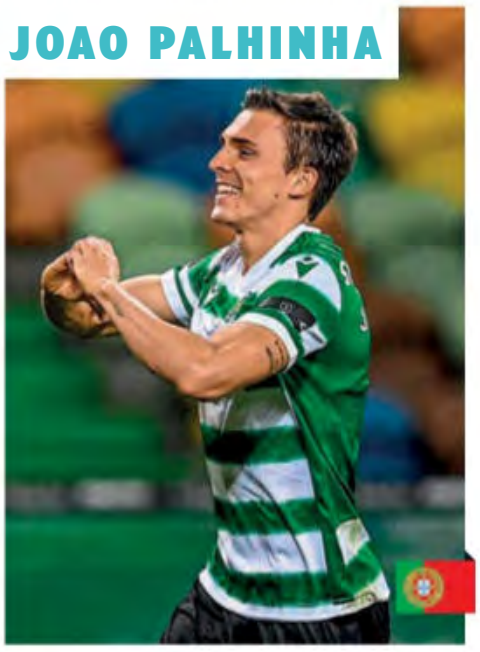
**(Spain)**
You could say without fear of contradiction that the Valencia skipper and left-back has become a lucky charm for "*La Roja*". In his opening 12 games for the Spanish national team – a period spanning his debut in September 2018 to November last year – Gaya has not once ended up on the losing side. Incredible how symmetrically this sequence of his has turned out, starting with a 6-0 Nations League win over Croatia on his debut and culminating in an identical margin of victory in the same competition against Germany.

It's not hard to see why Spain coach Luis Enrique sees him as such a key component in the reconstruction of the Reds, regarding him as a much better option at left-back than long-serving national team stalwart Jordi Alba of Barcelona. While Alba clearly is past his prime, Gaya, 25, still has plenty of untapped potential and when that process does come to fruition, what a player he will be.

Anyone needing any further proof of Gaya's quality ability should check out his recent displays in the Nations League against Germany. He was quite superb in both games, tenacious in the tackle, forever shuttling backwards and forwards and supplying final ball quality galore. In the first encounter with the Germans, a 1-1 draw in Stuttgart, he was on hand to bundle home an injury-time equaliser. In the return in Seville, he was again to the fore, bagging two assists.

A one-club man, a product of the Valencia youth ranks, he may feel more than a little relieved to be linking up with the Spain squad for a spot of continental trophy-hunting. This has been a disastrous season for all concerned at Valencia, the team involved in a relegation battle and fans and board conducting a civil war. For a player with a deep affinity with the club, that has to hurt. In his heart of hearts, he may not want to leave the Mestalla, but probably will have to. Destination Barcelona or Real Madrid. A good European Championship will help cash-strapped Valencia boost the asking price.

## JOAO PALHINHA



**(Portugal)**
25-year-old holding midfielder who has proved a revelation this term for Portuguese league pacesetters Sporting. Deserved earned his first call-up to the national squad in March. At a time when William Carvalho and Danilo are not playing regularly for Betis and PSG respectively, Palhinha could soon overtake them both.

## CONNOR ROBERTS

**(Wales)**
Indefatigable Swansea City full-back or wing-back with obvious hyperactive tendencies and a happy knack of scoring goals at vital times. Little wonder he is so popular at the Liberty Stadium; he is a local lad, a lifelong Swans supporter and plays with a smile on his face. Relaxes off the pitch in his carpentry workshop.

## DOMINIK SZOBOSZLAI

**(Hungary)**
Euro 2020 should be the perfect tonic for the extravagantly-gifted Magyar midfielder who, since joining RB Leipzig from Salzburg in January, has got used to grinding his teeth in frustration, laid low by a recurrent abductor problem. Instead of the thrill of a Bundesliga title race and a Champions League head-to-head with Liverpool, the 20-year-old has had to exist on a meagre diet of treatment rooms and rehabilitation centres. Expected to be fit for this summer's main event, he most definitely will be looking to make up for lost time with a strong showing in the finals.

This is one tournament he definitely will not want to miss. Not only do the Hungarians have two prestigious fixtures on home soil in the group phase (games in Budapest v Portugal and France). He and the Magyars also head to Munich to face Germany. The latter match-up on June 23 against the country where he now resides represents a mouth-watering opportunity for him – to show his country of residence exactly what he can do.

It cannot be stressed enough how much Hungary rely on the inspiration of Szoboszlai. A large proportion of the team's attacks are channelled through him and he literally booked their ticket to these finals, scoring a magnificent last-minute winner in the 2-1 play-off victory over Iceland. A masterclass of a goal, picking the ball up in his own half, driving forward and lashing home an unstoppable right-footer.

Former Germany World Cup-winning captain Lothar Matthaus, who once coached the Hungarian national team, has gone as far as to compare Szoboszlai to all-time Hungarian great Ferenc Puskas. "Although Puskas is an idol to all Hungarians, myself included, I don't want to be the next Puskas," he declared on his unveiling in Leipzig. "I'd rather be seen as Dominik Szoboszlai, to be a role model for Hungarian kids myself."

Two-footed, able to operate in a variety of positions in the attacking third, incredibly hard working and packing a rocket shot, this "Magnificent Magyar" is only starting to warm up.

## XAVER SCHLAGER

**(Austria)**
At his German club Wolfsburg, they call the 23-year-old "The Pressing Machine" and it's an apt description. One of the most fearsome ball-winners in the Bundesliga, the central midfielder puts his heart and soul into every game, never concerned about putting his body on the line. Joined Wolfsburg from RB Salzburg in the summer of 2019.

## JERRY ST JUSTE

**(Netherlands)**
Lightning-quick central defender, who despite playing for Bundesliga strugglers Mainz, recently received his first call up to the "*Oranje*" squad. If Liverpool back-four ace Virgil van Dijk does not recover in time for the Euro 2020 kick-off, St Juste may be the one to fill the huge void alongside Matthijs de Ligt.

## AMIN YOUNES

**(Germany)**
If the words of German *Bundestrainer* Joachim Low are anything to go by, the tiny Eintracht Frankfurt attacking midfielder has every chance of being one of the *Nationalmannschaft*'s wild card picks at Euro 2020.

Currently on loan at Eintracht from Napoli (who he joined in the summer of 2018), the 27-year-old Younes, has been in fine fettle at the Waldstadion this term and, conveniently for him, Low was present at arguably his best display of the campaign: a goalscoring Man-of-the-Match performance in Eintracht's shock 2-1 home won over champions Bayern Munich in February.

"Amin Younes had a very good game," the Germany coach declared afterwards. "He's gradually finding his rhythm again. His technique and movement were outstanding. He's the sort of player who can resolve one-on-one duels in the best way possible." Younes is, in many ways, the identikit Low player: lively, alert, full of eagle-eyed vision and a wonderful dribbler.

Younes, previously on the books of Borussia Monchengladbach, Kaiserslautern and Ajax, has played for Low's Germany before, winning five full international caps in 2017 and helping the side win the Confederations Cup in Russia that year. He netted twice in those "*Nationalelf*" run-outs, but subsequently fell out of favour, his selection claims undermined by a host of problems while at Ajax (knee trouble, loss of form and a lengthy suspension from first-team duties). He was his own worst enemy with the Amsterdammers, hit with a playing ban in the spring of 2018 after refusing to come on as a late substitute. "This was my biggest mistake," he confessed to German news agency *DPA*. "You don't do something like that. You must always be professional, regardless if you come on for a minute or thirty seconds."

Born in Dusseldorf to a German mother and Lebanese father, Amin seems to have learned his lesson. The moral of the story? Come what may, ability always will shine through.

## NIKLAS SULE

**(Germany)**
As long as he manages to control his weight – an issue which the media have flagged – Sule will have a crucial part to play for the *Nationalmannschaft* at the Euros. The Germans do have a soft centre at the back and they have to be pleased that Bayern man-mountain Sule is now available again after missing much of last season with an ACL injury.

## ANATOLIY TRUBIN

**(Ukraine)**
Reported to be on the watch-list of several European clubs, the 19-year-old Shakhtar Donetsk goalkeeper has been enjoying a season to remember, supplanting veteran Andriy Pyatov as Shakhtar's No.1, earning rave reviews in the Champions League and threatening to snatch Pyatov's long-held position as national team custodian.

KINGSLEY COMAN

# "I am 100 per cent Bayern"

**The Bayern Munich and France winger on his career to date and ambitions for the future – including this summer's European Championship**

Kingsley Coman's CV is a sight to behold. Since making his professional debut in 2013 – when he became Paris Saint-Germain's youngest-ever player aged 16 years, eight months and four days – the winger has ended every single season with a league winner's medal, lifting trophies in three different countries.

"It was never my plan to travel so much – it was really just something that happened," he admits.

His critics will point out – not unfairly – that he has not exactly made telling contributions in all nine of those successes: he played a grand total of 39 minutes for his two Ligue 1 medals, and started just five times when Juventus won Serie A in 2014-15. Before the current campaign, the most starts he'd managed in a single Bundesliga season for Bayern was 20.

Now though, he is proving to be a genuine difference-maker at the highest level; and there is no higher level than the Champions League. In last season's competition, he started seven times en route to winning the trophy, scoring the opening goal in group-stage wins over Red Star Belgrade and Tottenham Hotspur, and again, of course, in the final against PSG.

Starting in the showdown in Lisbon, against his first club, was undoubtedly the biggest moment of Coman's career. Yet the young Parisian was undaunted by the challenge: "It was more excitement to be playing in a Champions League final," he says. "It was a very good final and we knew PSG had many dangerous players and we had to be playing our best. I felt a lot of joy to win the Champions League."

Nevertheless, there was still some sympathy for the club where it all began for him.

"Even though I am 100 per cent Bayern, I felt sad for the PSG fans as I spent time there. All I wanted to do was win the Champions League – but yes, there was a little sadness."

Coman's departure from the French capital set something of a trend. Since he left at the end of his contract in 2014, several young stars have followed him through the Parc des Princes exit door to make their names elsewhere. Adrien Rabiot took the same route to Juventus, while Christopher Nkunku, Moussa Diaby, Jonathan Ikone and Boubakary Soumare have all gone on to impress elsewhere, to name but a few. Even last year, Tanguy Nianzou turned down a deal with the French champions to join Coman in Munich, having played in PSG's Champions League campaign.

The winger, though, is not surprised. "It is clear they have a project where they can go and buy the best established players in the world, so it makes it that much more difficult for younger players to break in."

As an 18-year-old, Coman was not prepared to wait. He joined Juventus at the end of his contract in 2014, but only stayed in Turin for one year before moving again, initially on a two-year loan to Bayern Munich, before signing permanently in 2017.

Life in Bavaria has not always been easy, but Coman has at least become more patient. Competition for places is something that he has come to accept. In July, Bayern announced the €45m signing of Leroy Sane just days after Coman had scored one goal and assisted another in a 4-0 victory at Wolfsburg. "We are always looking for players that will make a stronger squad and Sane has so much quality. We know that," he says of the ex-Manchester City man's arrival. "When I arrived at Bayern I had Robben, Douglas Costa and Ribery as ➤

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Winning goal... Coman heads in Bayern Munich's winner v Paris Saint-Germain

*Scudetto*...Coman was a title winner in his only full season with Juventus

competition for my position, so it's something I am used to.

"I feel that I am playing well, but this is Bayern and there are so many good players so you have to work so hard to keep your place in the team."

Generally, Coman has been successful in seeing off the challenge for places. He started 17 of Bayern Munich's first 25 Bundesliga games this season – only Robert Lewandowski and Thomas Muller were picked more often in the Bavarians' attack – chipping in with nine assists. In the Champions League, he was the club's joint-top goalscorer in the group stage with three strikes, notably starring in the 4-0 demolition of Atletico Madrid with two goals and an assist.

**Defeat...Coman appeared as a substitute in the final of Euro 2016**

It is this Champions League form that has seen Coman emerge as a potential option in Didier Deschamps' France plans. In March, he started in the 1-1 draw with Ukraine and arguably should have won a penalty. But overall he struggled to impress, and was replaced after an hour by Ousmane Dembele. His Bayern form has, as yet, not been replicated on the international stage.

"It is always going to be a motivation to play for your country at a major tournament, but the reality is you get picked for your country based on the performances for your club and that is what I must focus on."

Having made his debut in 2015, Coman played six times at Euro 2016 as France reached the final on home soil, yet his progress stalled over the following two years. He played just three times in qualifying for the 2018 World Cup, and was only on standby for the squad until injury ended his hopes of going to Russia.

Although he has featured more often since then, his place in the team – or even the squad – is still not guaranteed. "We have some of the best young players in the world," says Coman enthusiastically, but clearly this is a factor in his limited opportunities. No coach in the world has as much strength in depth to choose from as Deschamps, with several genuinely world-class players throughout the squad, particularly in attack.

In theory, it is possible to construct a fantasy line-up where Coman stars alongside the likes of Dembele, Antoine Griezmann and Kylian Mbappe up front, interchanging positions and running rings around defenders.

Yet this is simply not Deschamps' style. Olivier Giroud is likely to lead the attack, offering a foil for Griezmann behind him and Mbappe on one flank, with a tactically disciplined runner on the other side. In Russia that was Blaise Matuidi, but since he moved to MLS it has been Moussa Sissoko or Adrien Rabiot, or more often, a change of formation to either 3-4-1-2 or 4-3-1-2, leaving little room for an out-and-out winger like Coman.

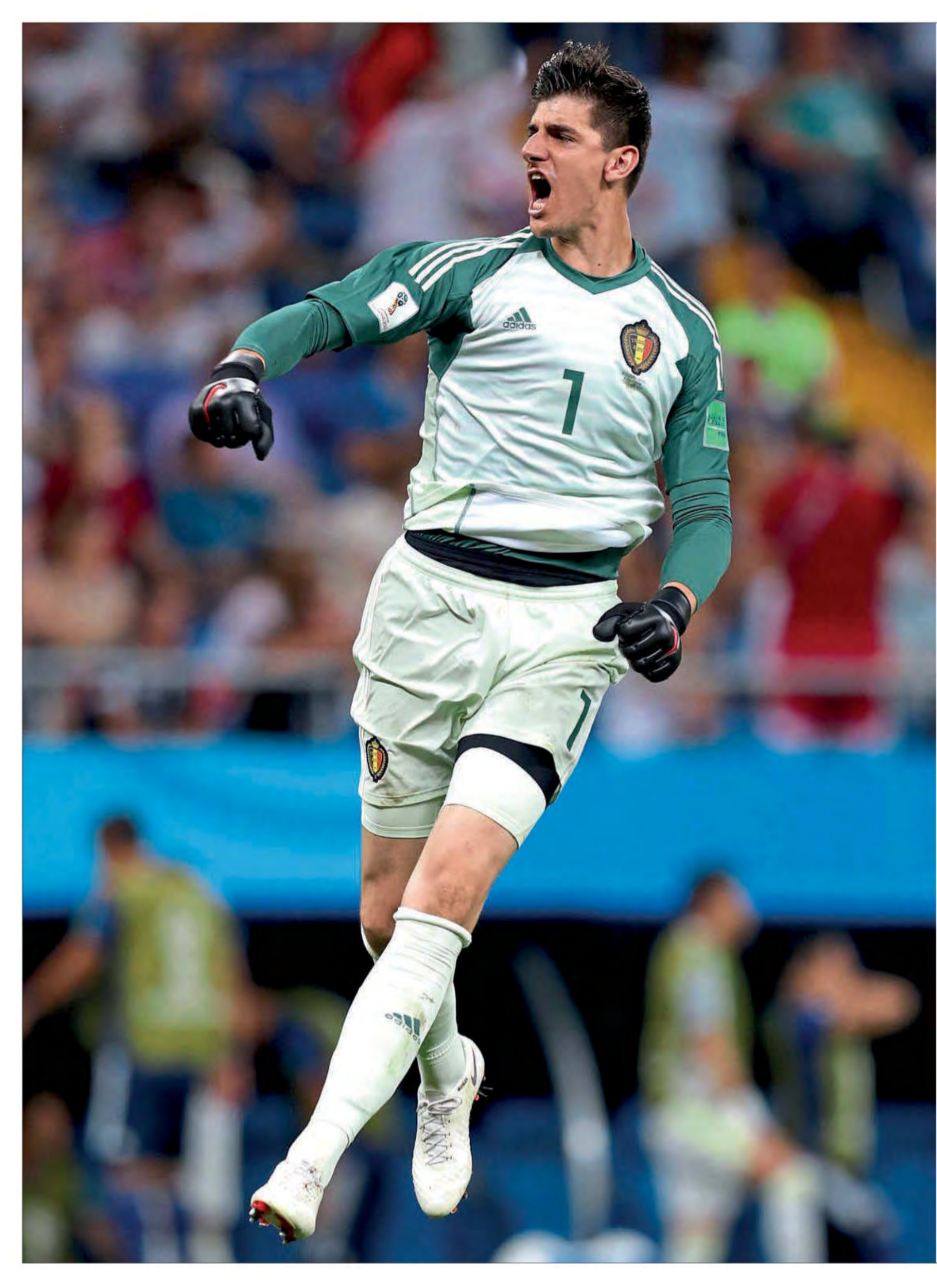
> "With the players we have, dominating international football is the aim"

Nevertheless, having a Champions League final match-winner to call upon is not to be sniffed at, and Deschamps will find it hard to leave Coman on the standby list this time. And if he could play a decisive role in becoming a European champion at international level too, he would surely put to bed any doubts about his pedigree.

"That is the aim. We know our ability, but when you talk about winning a European Championship or World Cup it is never easy because of the quality of teams you need to beat along the way. But with the players we have, dominating international football is the aim. Hopefully this group of players will be around for many more tournaments."

*Interview by Donald Deane*
*Words by Jamie Evans*

**Bayern boy...Pep Guardiola signed Coman back in 2015, initially on a two-year loan deal**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THIBAUT COURTOIS

# "This is a very special group of players"

Belgium goalkeeper Thibaut Courtois on his team's chances at this summer's Euros, and that "Golden Generation" tag…

**It's been a mixed season for Real Madrid, although you have been one of the most consistent players. How do you feel 2020-21 has gone so far?**
We are still fighting for trophies and that is the main thing. There have been some results that we have not been happy with, but we have always had some very good performances. It is a strange season in many ways but there is big belief we can be successful.

I feel confident for both La Liga and the Champions League but as always it will not be easy. We have to show real consistency in La Liga and in Europe, as we know that we have to take things up a level.

**And on a personal level, do you feel settled at Real in your third season? The pressure at the club must be huge…**
There is pressure but that is no surprise. You know that before you join. If you want to play for Real Madrid you have to accept that pressure is part of the job. The expectation is there every season – we know that as players and take on that responsibility.

**The season will end with the European Championship – how excited are you?**
To play in an international tournament is always exciting but there is so much football to be played before then. It is normal to think about it and to be excited, but at the same time it is important to remain focused on success with Real Madrid.

**It's just over 20 years since Belgium co-hosted Euro 2000 with the Netherlands. Did you watch that tournament? What are your memories of it?**
I was just a small boy but I remember all the excitement around the country. It was not a successful tournament for us but it is always an honour to be asked to host a European Championship or World Cup.

**Is there a greater sense of anticipation for this tournament after last year's postponement?**
Sport is so important for so many people. I know that during lockdown it wasn't just playing football that I missed but also watching football on TV as well, and NBA and Formula One too. It was disappointing for fans last summer but it had to be safety first. Hopefully by the time the tournament comes around the world is in a better place and fans can enjoy being at the stadiums.

**Are you disappointed that Belgium won't be hosting any matches?**
It would have been nice, especially to play in the European Championship in your own country in front of your own fans. It isn't something I have thought about so much – the nations have been chosen and we just want to be successful.

**You have been drawn alongside Denmark, Russia and Finland – what do you make of your group?**
It is a strong group and you look at the three opponents we have and there is not one easy game. They all have players that can cause us problems and we need to be ready.

**You'll be playing Denmark in Copenhagen and Russia in St. Petersburg. Do you think that puts you at a big disadvantage, or are you relishing the challenge of being the away team?**
Maybe for them they are thinking about home advantage, especially if fans are allowed inside the stadium, but for us we are just looking at them as games we want to win. Good for them they are in their home stadiums, but for us our objectives are clear.

**Belgium are the No.1 ranked team in the world – do you think that makes you the favourites for the tournament?**
If we are ranked number one, two or three it doesn't change things. We know that this current Belgium squad is a special group of

Zamora Trophy...Courtois was named La Liga's best goalkeeper for the third time in 2019-20

Nations League... Courtois alternated with Simon Mignolet in the Belgium goal as they won their group

players and we want to win things. I don't talk about us being favourites, but we are entering the tournament to try to win it.

**What other nations concern you going into the tournament?**
There are so many good teams and I don't want to disrespect anybody by not talking about them all. If I have to talk about one, though, it is France. They are world champions for a reason, but they will not be the only strong team who are going to be confident of success.

**What is the spirit like in the squad – are you confident of going far in the tournament?**
The spirit is good – we know this is a very good group of players and we are all playing for each other and also the coach. It would be nice to be successful for the fans.

"[Eden Hazard] is ready to explode again for Real Madrid and for Belgium"

**Reaching the semi-finals of the 2018 World Cup was a huge moment for Belgium and you received an heroic welcome when you returned. Looking back now, do you feel more disappointed that you didn't go further, or pride for achieving what you did?**
It is possible to feel both emotions, I think. It is an achievement to reach the semi-finals of a World Cup but, of course, when you go that far in a competition it is always a disappointment not to reach the final and try to win it.

**This Belgium team is often referred to as a "golden generation" – how do you feel about that label?**
Most labels like that are invented by the media so it is not something we pay much attention to. What we do know is that this is a very special group of players and we do want to achieve things, but because we know we are capable of it not because of labels.

**The likes of yourself, De Bruyne, Hazard, Alderweireld and Vertonghen are all approaching 30 or already in their 30s – do you feel any sense that you're running out of time to win a tournament?**
As a goalkeeper I feel like I have many good years ahead of me – and even outfield players can play at the top until their mid-30s. The reality is no matter what your age European Championships and World Cups only come around once every four years, so there is always a limited opportunity to win them.

**Do you feel that you have to win something to consider this generation a success?**
It is important to focus on the fact that we want to and that we know we can rather than looking at it as a pressure. We know we can, we know it requires hard work and maybe even a little bit of luck.

**How has the team dealt with Vincent Kompany's retirement? Have new leaders emerged in the squad?**
Vincent was not just one of the great Belgium defenders but one of the greatest defenders ever. He was our leader but players can't play forever – everything must come to an end. He was a big leader for us, but there is a lot of experience in this squad and it is important for many of us to step up.

**Are you a leader, or do you prefer to leave that to other senior players?**
I am one of the more experienced players in the squad and I do have a responsibility to step up and help the younger players. As a goalkeeper you need to have the confidence to be commanding. It doesn't have to mean shouting but it is about having authority.

Star men...Kevin De Bruyne and Romelu Lukaku will be expected to deliver for Belgium this summer

Team-mates... Courtois and Eden Hazard at World Cup 2018

**Eden Hazard has had plenty of injury problems – how difficult has it been for him at Real? Is he still the player that won the Silver Ball at the World Cup?**
It has been unfortunate for him that he has had so many injuries since joining Madrid, but I feel he is ready to explode again for Madrid and for Belgium. We must allow him time to find his sharpness and fitness again, but I am confident that we will see the best of Eden Hazard again. Everybody knows he is one of the best players in the world.

**And your top goalscorer, Romelu Lukaku. Do you feel that he is slightly underappreciated or does he now get the credit he deserves?**
He is not underappreciated by anybody in the Belgium national team, I can promise you that. If he is, I cannot understand why. At Everton he scored many goals, at Manchester United he scored many goals and now at Inter he is scoring many goals. Then add to that he is Belgium's all-time top goalscorer, it is clear to anybody who knows football that he is one of the best and most clinical strikers in the world.

*Interview by Donald Deane*

REECE OXFORD

# "I needed to go overseas and get away from England to grow up"

Reece Oxford reflects on life in Germany

August 9, 2015. It's the opening weekend of the new Premier League season. Arsenal welcome West Ham to the Emirates Stadium on a warm summer's afternoon. Aged just 16 years and 237 days, Reece Oxford is making his league debut to become the second-youngest starter in the competition's history. Just over a month earlier, at 16 years and 198 days old, he became the club's youngest-ever player, when he started in a Europa League qualifier against Andorran outfit FC Lusitanos. Oxford is thrown in at the deep end: his first task is to keep tabs on Mesut Ozil. Nothing comes easy in this league.

Yet the teenager managed to inspire his team to victory with a Man of the Match performance. Goals from Cheikhou Kouyate and Mauro Zarate either side of half-time secured a 2-0 win for the Hammers.

While most 16-year-olds are studying for exams, Oxford was facing a different kind of pressure. Bursting onto the scene as a footballer at such a young age is by no means an easy feat and one that comes with its own difficulties and challenges.

"It puts a lot on your shoulders to perform and live up to the name that everybody was giving me at the time," Oxford says. "It is especially difficult when you are a young player in England. It's hard for the body too, when you are playing amongst professionals and you are just a kid who's still developing."

A lot has changed since then. Oxford, 22, is in Germany now plying his trade with Bundesliga side Augsburg. Promoted in 2011, *Die Fuggerstadter* (Residents of the Fugger City) have become an established member of the top flight within the last decade.

"It's the second-best league in the world," says Oxford. "The Premier League just edges it. The big-money moves go there. Everyone's eyes are on the Premier League. But the Bundesliga is a great league as well."

On his 18th birthday, Oxford signed a new four-and-a-half-year contract with West Ham worth £20,000 a week, less than a year after signing his first professional deal. Yet, just one month later he was loaned to Championship club Reading by Slaven Bilic to gain first-team experience.

Limited opportunities at the Madejski Stadium saw Oxford return to his parent club in the summer, before being loaned again – only this time it was overseas in Germany with Borussia Monchengladbach. Reports suggested a potential permanent move to the Rhineland, but Oxford's loan was cut short.

"When I was first there, things were going well. But then there were a few problems. When I went back to West Ham I got injured. I was willing to move back to Monchengladbach and finish the loan and when I did go back for the second loan spell, I found it difficult to get back into the team."

Unfortunately, it wasn't meant to be at Monchengladbach – even second time around. Things had not worked out in the way it was hoped. Oxford's loan spell finished at the end of the 2017-18 season after making just seven league appearances for *Die Fohlen* (The Colts).

"Monchengladbach is a great club, but that's just life. Sometimes it goes the other way and you've got to move on. I wouldn't say I wanted to go there permanently, but I just wanted to show everyone the ability I had."

Monchengladbach did not signal the end of the loan spells, though. The opportunity to break into the first team at West Ham still did not come. The following season, Oxford was off again, this time to Augsburg for the second half of the 2018-19 campaign. However, like with Monchengladbach, Oxford struggled to regularly nail down a place in the starting XI. He made just eight Bundesliga appearances in total, including a humiliating 8-1 defeat against Wolfsburg on the final day of the season.

But after so many loans, and interest from Augsburg to make the move permanent, he decided the time was right to part ways with the club that had given him the chance to make his boyhood dream a reality. He packed his bags and headed to Bavaria once more, leaving his life in London behind.

"West Ham is such a big club and I felt I would not get the same opportunities there as I would get elsewhere. Here at Augsburg, ➤

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I have had the chance to show my ability. In Germany, there is a great structure for young players and you learn more. I needed to go overseas and get away from England, to grow up and try something new."

Oxford is no stranger to living alone in a foreign country – this is already his fourth separate spell in Germany. But moving abroad is not without its challenges, and professional footballers are not exempt from these. After all, they are only human too.

"It was difficult. It's things that people don't really notice that affect a footballer," he says. "I moved over here without my family. It's difficult to change from having your mum and family all around you to being by yourself every day and having to deal with issues alone. When you are not playing, you don't come home to anyone and no one is around you. It's really tough for the mind.

"It's simple things like coming home and not having your mum's meal or being away from friends and not seeing them every day. You need your friends, family and loved ones around you to help you move forward sometimes. But I've learned to just move on without it, and I know that if I need them, I can just call them. I've learned to do it myself and get the motivation myself."

Situated within Swabia, around 50km west of Bavarian capital Munich, Augsburg is Germany's third-oldest city, with a population of almost 300,000. It's certainly a contrast environment to the hustle and bustle of London – where the population is almost 30 times that number, but Oxford enjoys it, nonetheless.

"It's completely different to London, which I think is good for young players. It's given me a different vibe compared to where I'm from. I see a different culture. People here are more disciplined. They focus on the little things more. There's not much to do but I think that's good for me, as it enables me to focus on the footballing side of things."

Borussia boy... two spells at Monchengladbach didn't go to plan

Is it better here or worse? "I wouldn't say it's better, because I'm from London and grew up there. That's my home. I'd always say my hometown is the best. London is a great city," he says passionately.

His German is coming along well too. Oxford tells *World Soccer* he is having lessons, unlike when he was at Gladbach, but explains how the global pandemic has made this increasingly difficult. "I can understand most of the language now, but the speaking and pronunciation is a bit hard for me. After all, I am a London boy!" Despite all of the fantastic delicacies on offer in Germany,

> "West Ham is such a big club and I felt I would not get the same opportunities there as I would get elsewhere. Here at Augsburg, I have had the chance to show my ability"

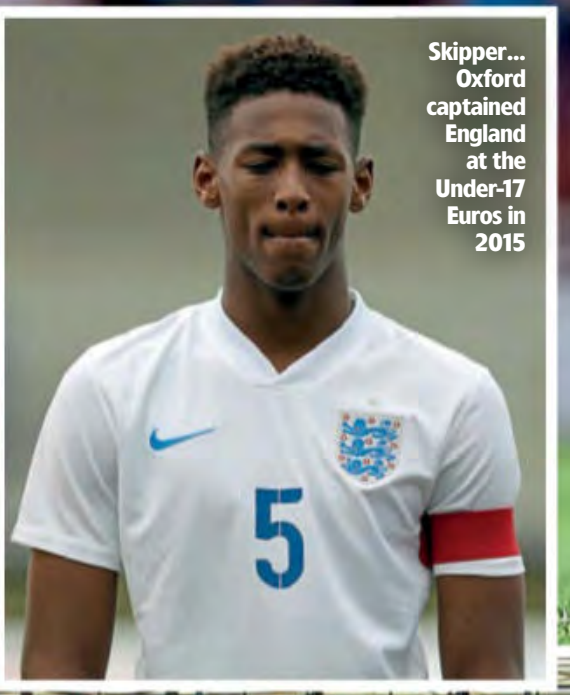
English tussle... Oxford tackles fellow Englishman Jude Bellingham of Borussia Dortmund

Oxford admits he hasn't really taken to any of them. "I've mostly kept it all the same as from back home," he says.

In spite of all the ups and downs in his career so far, there are very few things he would have done differently. Except for perhaps one thing. "Maybe little personal stuff, like gym a bit more," he says with a chuckle. "I'm on the right path right now and I will try to do my best while I am here."

At such a young age, Oxford still has the majority of his career ahead of him. Helping Augsburg to push on domestically is the main task at hand, but an international call-up remains a future goal. So far Oxford has represented England from Under-16 level, right through to the Under-20 set-up –

Boy wonder... Oxford was Man of the Match on his Premier League debut in 2015




Skipper... Oxford captained England at the Under-17 Euros in 2015

where he last featured in 2017. Although he has recently broken into the Augsburg first team on a regular basis, he insists there has been no sign of any contact from the national team hierarchy as of yet.

"I haven't spoken to anyone. If it does come along that'll be a great thing. If not, then I will just continue to work hard and wait for my time," he says.

How about a return to England? "Right now, I'm not looking at any other team. I'm just focusing on the team I'm at now. Here is my team. I'm not focusing on whether I'm going to go back to England. As long as I can just help Augsburg and give the best that I know I can give, I'll be happy."

*Interview by Reiss Tigwell*

At home...the 22-year-old has settled in at the Bundesliga club

6 of the best

# Under the radar expats

A growing number of British players are heading abroad to build careers. **Tom Scarborough** picks out some of the most interesting cases

Credit: @StevenLennon7 Instagram

## 1 Steven LENNON
FH HAFNARFJORDUR

In 2007, Rangers youth prospect Steven Lennon appeared on the brink of first-team stardom when he scored a stunning hat-trick in a 5-0 thrashing of Glasgow rivals Celtic in the Scottish Youth Cup final. The highly-rated teenager developed into a troublesome 20-something, appearing only three times for Rangers' senior side before eventually leaving for Dundalk in 2010.

Adapting away from his self-confessed drinking and gambling culture, Lennon found his feet in Iceland, first with Fram, then FH.

Last season, Lennon matched the league record for most goals scored by a foreign player – 17 goals in just 18 appearances. His form fired FH to a second-placed finish in the Urvalsdeild and a qualifying spot in the inaugural Europa Conference League set to begin this summer.

## 2 George SAUNDERS
ENVIGADO

South America's only professional British player began his career in Arsenal's youth ranks. A family move to Spain saw Saunders snapped up by Villarreal, where he quickly acclimatised to the playing style and language. A later spell at Espanyol culminated with Saunders representing Catalonia Under-17s, alongside Bojan Krkic, Thiago Alcantara and Jordi Alba.

Opportunity arose when a friend recommended Saunders to Colombian club America de Cali. Eight years later and Saunders remains in Colombia, now with top-tier Envigado in Medellin.

Saunders was coined *"El Britanico"* by the Colombian press and he deems it his "destiny" to be in the City of Eternal Spring.

Credit: @georgesaunders Instagram

## 3 Jay BOTHROYD
### HOKKAIDO CONSADOLE SAPPORO

Ex-Coventry City, Wolverhampton Wanderers, Cardiff City and QPR forward Jay Bothroyd moved to Japan in 2015. His first port of call was J2 League outfit Jubilo Iwata, where 20 goals in 32 appearances earned him the league's Golden Boot and inspired Jubilo to second place and a return to the top flight.

A move to Sapporo followed, where Bothroyd has remained since 2017, and he is now closing in on 100 appearances for the Consa.

Bothroyd's sole England cap came during a friendly against France in 2010, and he claims another of his career achievements is scoring more goals in Japan than Gary Lineker, following the striker's stint at Nagoya Grampus in the early 1990s.

## 4 Adam MITTER
### RAYONG

At first glance, Adam Mitter's CV would appear more akin to a gap year itinerary. The Shrewsbury-born centre-back has played in Sweden, Australia, India, the Philippines, Canada, Singapore, Indonesia and Thailand. The globetrotter usually spends a season at one club, before moving onto another country.

Mitter's popularity speaks for itself. He's amassed a cult-hero status in Asia, building an Instagram following of over 20k. One Indonesian fan was overcome when bumping into Mitter on the street, weeping: "This is the best day of my life!"

Currently the defender resides in Rayong, a Thai coastal province, where he is a regular starter for the city's top-flight side.

## 5 Mo ADAMS
### ATLANTA UNITED

Born in Eritrea in eastern Africa, Mo Adams moved to Nottingham as an eight-year-old where he was courted by the academies of both Forest and Derby. Unable to secure a professional contract, Adams played at non-league Boston United before earning a place at New York's Syracuse University. After college, the midfielder was selected as a first-round pick by Chicago Fire in the 2018 MLS SuperDraft.

Alongside team-mate and FIFA World Cup winner, Bastian Schweinsteiger, Adams made 25 appearances over two seasons for Chicago Fire, before a move south to Atlanta brought the 24-year-old a US Open Cup victory, his first MLS goal and appearances in the CONCACAF Champions League.

## 6 John JOHNSON
### ATK MOHUN BAGAN

After a single appearance for boyhood club Middlesbrough, Johnson joined League Two's Northampton Town, where he spent four seasons and notched up 150 outings for the Cobblers.

Johnson traded the East Midlands for the Deccan Plateau in 2013 when ex-Northampton team-mate Ashley Westwood invited the defender to join him at Bengaluru FC, based in the southern Indian city of Bangalore.

Johnson enjoyed a triumphant spell there, securing two I-League titles and reaching the AFC Cup final in 2016 (Asia's equivalent of the Europa League), where Bengaluru lost 1-0 to Iraqi outfit Al Quwa.

# 150 YEARS

On the 150th anniversary of the FA Cup, **Keir Radnedge** reflects on what has made it the most influential and pioneering cup competition in world football

Michel Platini was in expansive, relaxed mood on a sun-splashed breakfast terrace before a Champions League draw in Monte Carlo. He was the all-powerful head of UEFA, explaining why he was transferring the Champions League final from its traditional midweek slot to a Saturday.

"It's the real day you must have for a cup final," he told me. "When I was a young boy I remember the excitement, every year, for the day of the FA Cup final in England. We did not have much football on television then and this was the great occasion: Wembley, 100,000 fans, the anticipation, the singing, maybe the Queen or whoever – and the most important match."

The 1950s and early 1960s, with the new magic of television, brought the dramatic reality of the FA Cup to fans around the world. That first Saturday in May was always "Cup Final Day". Fans in England, for all their own passion, were ignorant of the power abroad evinced by those black-and-white and grainy-grey images.

Yet here was Platini, years later, reaching back to the example of the FA Cup – the world's oldest competition – as the stylistic pinnacle of the presentation of elite football.

Platini went further in drawing on his childhood memory. UEFA, under predecessor Lennart Johansson, had introduced a pitch trophy presentation but Platini dismissively scrapped it to recreate the traditional long walk up the steps to the VIP box presentation. Again: "that was the way at the FA Cup final."

A well-documented explosion in worldwide popularity of football, with its technological revolution and billion-generating eruption of other competitions, has reduced its significance, value and status. But the inspiration remains undimmed.

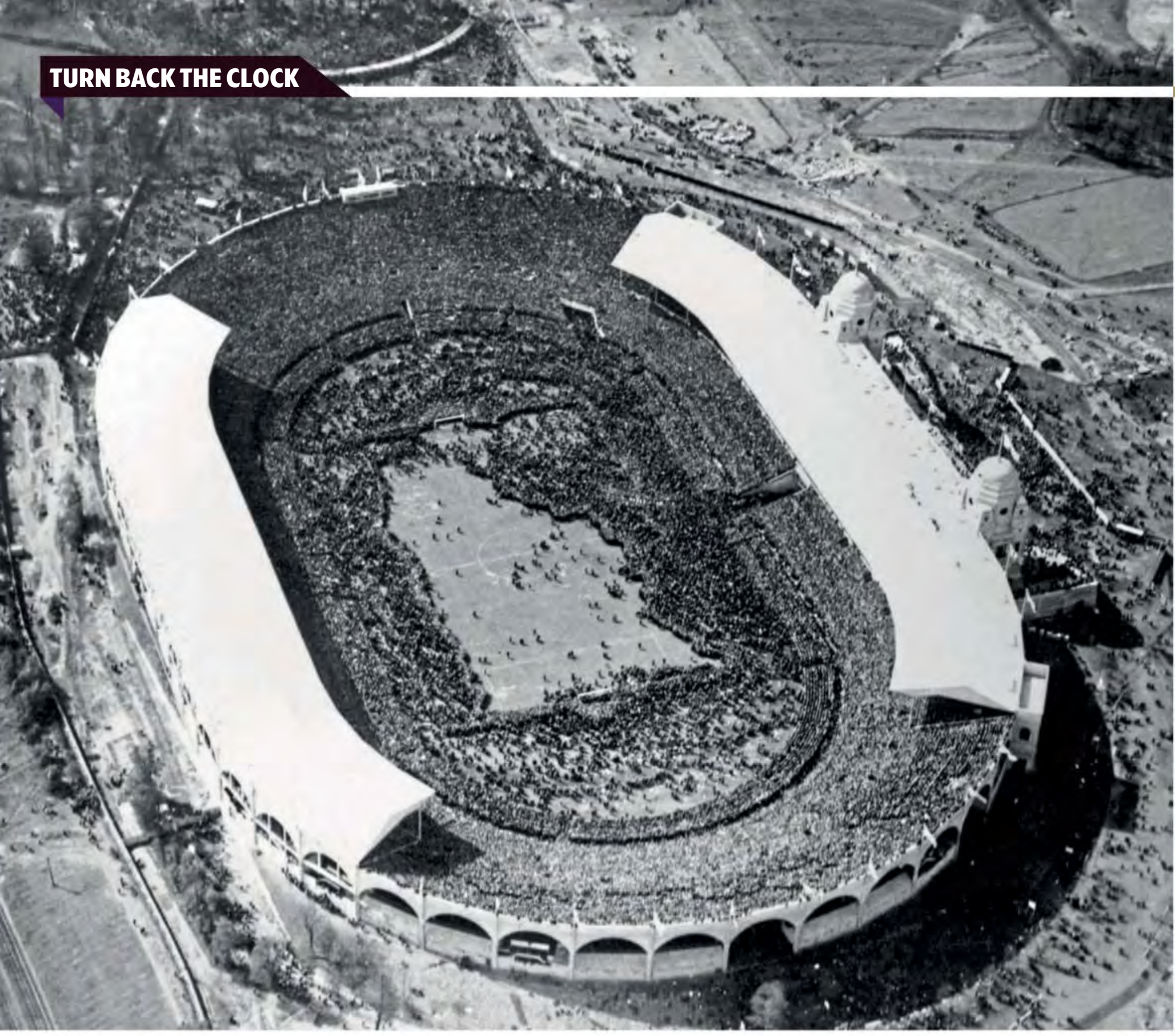
The shape of the game as the world sees it today has been dictated by the milestones found along the route of the FA Cup. Leagues are essential and (sometimes) exciting but nothing can compete with the drama of knockout football, as pioneered in England in the late 19th century.

Most potent memories from the World Cup, Champions League and European Championship are invested in such knockout drama.

Some eight years after the founding of The Football Association, in 1863, its seven-man committee considered a proposal "that a Challenge Cup should be established in connection with the Association, for which all clubs belonging to the Association should be invited to compete." The historic date was July 20, 1871; Charles W. Alcock was the proposer.

Alcock was not only secretary of the FA but a noted footballer and

Fly Emirates
THE Emirates FA CUP
THE Emirates FA CUP



**Overcrowded... Wembley ahead of the 1923 cup final**

cricketer, a journalist and later secretary of Surrey County Cricket Club. He was typical of contemporaries for whom association football ("soccer" as he dubbed it) was not the only sport. Racing, boxing and hunting were a few of the other pastimes in which the sporting amateur engaged.

But it was in narrowing down football's focus to a gripping national competition that Alcock – more by accident than design – threw open welcoming doors to a populace enjoying the leisure-pursuit fruits of the Factory Acts, which halted work at 2pm on a Saturday afternoon.

Alcock drew on the inter-house system from his Harrow schooldays for the simple knockout concept. Thus, October 16, 1871, saw the FA set the regulations and accept 15 pioneering entries; nowadays the annual entry runs to around 800.

Just as Alcock would barely recognise today's football, so today's fan would struggle to follow the game that he knew: no pitch marking save for the touchlines, a tape not a crossbar, no heading, one-handed throw-ins, two umpires but no referee or assistants. And technology? Definitely not.

The impetus drawn from that first meaningful national competition cannot be underestimated. The competitive cementation of the newly-unified Laws of the Game delivered the platform for both a first official international match between England and Scotland in 1873 and then the creation of the Football League in 1888.

> The shape of the game as the world sees it today has been dictated by the milestones found along the route of the FA Cup

Along the way, the cup's outreach reflected the eruption of organised football beyond the pioneering universities and public schools and into the grasp of the common man.

The first final, on March 16, 1872, was contested between Royal Engineers – a team of commissioned army officers – and Wanderers, a club of former public school pupils from south London. Engineers were hampered in the tenth minute when one of their players broke a collarbone. Wanderers duly won 1-0 with a goal from Morton Peto Betts. Appropriately Betts, an Old Harrovian, had been a member of the FA committee that created the competition.

Betts played under the name of A. H. Chequer. In the first round a

team named Harrow Chequers had withdrawn after being drawn against Wanderers. Betts, a Chequers player, duly joined Wanderers. This was not a problem. After all, Alcock – a fellow Old Harrovian – was the Wanderers captain. Incidentally, the £20 silver cup was not presented after the match at the Kennington Oval but four weeks later during Wanderers' annual dinner.

The first 12 years of the competition were dominated by four clubs: Wanderers (five wins), Old Etonians (two), Royal Engineers and Oxford University (one each). They totalled 19 final appearances between them.

Lord Kinnaird was the cup's first superstar. He was a cup winner five times with Wanderers and Old Etonians, became president of the FA in 1890 and remained powerfully in office until his death shortly before the final in 1923. Kinnaird and Alcock, against their traditionalist instincts, were also two of the instigators of the acceptance of professionalism.

The idea of being paid had been anathema to early cup heroes. They played for love of the game. But it was the very success of the cup they created which sparked the demand for more regular competition: hence the creation of the Football League and the consequent introduction of professionalism.

A public schools game had become the people's game.

Simultaneously British businessmen, industrialists, empire-builders and adventurers were spreading the game around the world, but in no other country has the cup ever garnered the fervour generated by the original. Or, coincidentally, the very particular English veneration for giant-killers.

Football's burgeoning popularity was evidenced at the 1923 FA Cup final when the game's first 100,000-plus crowd swarmed all over the new Empire Stadium at Wembley. Bolton Wanderers beat West Ham United 2-0 only after the overflowing crowd was edged back to the pitch fringe by mounted police including, most famously, PC George Scorey on his white horse Billie.

No authored history of the game can be considered complete without a picture of those moments: one of those iconic images that sealed the status of the FA Cup in the narrative of the nation.

By now the FA Cup and Football League had learned to live side by side. For all the progress of the game and its great players, no club managed to win the league and cup "double" during the inter-war years, not even Herbert Chapman's great Arsenal. But it

**History-maker... Bill Nicholson, the first-ever double-winning manager**

continued to set a trend: community singing in 1927 and shirt numbers worn for the first time in the 1933 final between Everton and Manchester City. Squad numbers way before their time.

Fascination with the unattainable "double" grew in the 1950s which saw the peak of the FA Cup's popularity, fired by television coverage which gripped the attention of not only fans in England but around the world – even if they had to wait for newsreels at their local cinemas.

A string of finals were spoiled by serious injury: Arsenal full-back Walley Barnes in 1952, Bolton's Eric Bell in the so-called "Matthews Final" of 1953, Manchester City goalkeeper Bert Trautmann with a broken neck in 1956, Manchester United's Ray Wood in 1957, Nottingham Forest winger Roy Dwight in 1959, Blackburn Rovers' Dave Whelan in 1960 and Leicester City's Len Chalmers in 1961.

That latter final saw captain Danny Blanchflower lift the trophy as Tottenham Hotspur made history as the first double winners in the 20th century.

The patently unfair disruption to all of those finals led directly to the introduction by English football of the first substitutes in 1965. Football was becoming a squad game not a team game. The FA Cup had again been a vector for revolutionary change.

By now its greatest days were over. The arrival of the aero jet engine put wings on the new European cups and, ultimately, directors' and managers' self-protective priority for Premier League over FA Cup. TV demands killed the unified Saturday kick-off and the Monday radio broadcast of the next round's draw, while even replays have now fallen victim to fixture congestion.

The mystique of the FA Cup faded further with the demolition of its grand old stage in 2001. Six years later a smart, sanitised Wembley arose from the rubble of the Empire Stadium. Construction costs forced the cash-strapped FA to import just about every major match going, including the FA Cup's own semi-finals.

That old exclusivity of the FA Cup final was gone, never to return. Further indignities saw the match evicted from its traditional first Saturday in May with even the kick-off time shunted back into the evening.

"Why?" asked Platini rhetorically while drifting, wistfully, down Memory Lane over breakfast in Monte Carlo. His presidential alter ego knew the answers: the same answers which helped persuade him to move the Champions League into its own Saturday slot – TV ratings, commercial revenue and sponsor preference.

But no more room for sentiment? Wrong.

The continued existence of the FA Cup tells not only its own tale but the evolving story of association football itself.

**"Matthews Final"... Stanley Matthews in the 1953 final**

# VICTORY FOR LAPORTA

**Sid Lowe** reports on Joan Laporta's return to the Barcelona boardroom

Lionel Messi was the first of the Barcelona players to arrive at the Nou Camp, getting there early one Sunday morning in March. There was no game on – they had won in Pamplona the night before – and he wasn't there to play; instead, he was there to exercise his right as a club member to cast his vote in elections to decide the next president of the football club. Which he did for the first time, holding his son Thiago by the hand as he stood by the ballot box and smiled.

At least, it looked like he was smiling behind that mask.

By the end of the day, another familiar face was smiling and this time you could see it, the mask literally slipping. Not just smiling: singing, shouting, and spraying cava about. Joan Laporta – Barcelona's president when Messi made his debut and now, like everyone else, dependent upon him – is back. Almost 18 years after he first took over at the club, 11 since he was forced out, and six since he was last defeated at the polls, the man who built the most successful era in their history is back, his image splashed across the front pages, arms raised in a victory sign.

Suddenly, amidst the gloom, a seemingly never-ending crisis, an optimism swept across Catalonia. Laporta's victory felt like something new, and yet it was rooted in nostalgia too, the memory of those days when they felt invincible; days that appeared ever further away.

A revolutionary during the 1990s when he took on the former president Jose Luis Nunez as part of the campaigning opposition group, the Blue Elephant, and when he won the 2003 elections; this time Laporta sought to strike a more moderate, conciliatory tone. And yet there was still that glint in his eye, that hint of mischief, and his campaign was kick-started by the kind of bold, provocative statement that had once seemed to sum him up: a banner covering an entire building within sight of the Bernabeu, where he had been the president when Barcelona defeated Real Madrid 6-2 there in 2009. "Looking forward to seeing you again," the slogan ran.

As it turned out, the massive banner proved a masterstroke. Elections that had begun with Victor Font as the big favourite were turned upside down when Laporta finally threw his hat into the ring. When the billboard appeared there was a surge, a sense that the old bombastic Laporta was back, that they no longer had anything to fear. It was at least in part the charisma that carried him to victory.

Victory...Laporta celebrates winning the election

Defeated...Laporta's rivals Toni Freixa (L) and Victor Font (R)

And Laporta did not just win, he won by miles.

Of 140,798 members, 110,290 have the right to vote. For the first time, a postal ballot was set up because of the pandemic, with 22,811 members casting their vote that way, while the remaining 87,479 could go to seven polling stations in Catalonia and Andorra. Despite restrictions on mobility because of COVID, 50.42 per cent turned out – the third highest since elections began in 1953. Although the voting constituency is usually considered conservative, not his natural supporters (over half of them are aged over 50), Laporta swept the rest aside.

He polled 54.28 per cent of the vote. Font was second on 29.99 per cent, Toni Freixa polled 8.58 per cent.

Elections had been called after the former president Josep Maria Bartomeu was forced to resign in October. They closed a week which began with police raiding the Nou Camp and Bartomeu spending a night in a prison cell, interrogated as part of an on-going investigation into alleged corruption relating to the hiring of a social media company accused of defending him and defaming "opposition" figures and even players.

Although eight men initially announced their intention to stand, only Laporta, Font and Freixa gathered sufficient signatures to make the cut and officially become candidates.

Font had been the first to announce his intention to stand, spending the last couple of years preparing his bid for the presidency. His initial programme had appeared popular but Laporta's arrival served almost immediately to overshadow the rest, not least as he lacks the charisma of his opponent.

Font had been hit particularly hard by the fact that he had announced that Xavi (initially as coach and then as a kind of general manager) and Jordi Cruyff (as technical secretary) would form part of his project, only for both of them to fall silent once Laporta had announced he was going to stand. They did not want to speak against a man with whom they had been closely aligned before and maintained a relationship now, nor close the door to a return under him. Cruyff had even said that his late father – very much a spiritual guide for many Barcelona supporters – would have voted for Laporta "for sure."

Font kept insisting that the entire programme had been constructed with the former midfielder and that he would return to the club under him. Xavi though failed to explicitly, publicly back him. "That didn't help," Font conceded after the elections, with admirable constraint and significant understatement. Jordi Cruyff, meanwhile, is now expected to join Laporta as technical secretary.

**There is a lot to be done. Barcelona have to find over €260m by the end of the season just to service short-term debts and they're over €1bn in the red**

Laporta and Font broadly occupied the same "ideological" space while Freixa – who had been part of the outgoing administration – presented himself as a man who could unite the two sides of Barcelona's great political divide, trenches in a civil war going all the way back to Johan Cruyff's battles with Nunez. That Font and Laporta together polled 84 per cent represented a clear rejection of any idea of continuity.

That should be no surprise, even if the margin was greater than expected. Barcelona have lurched from crisis to crisis, in institutional, sporting and economic terms. The elections were held in the wake of the arrests in the so-called "Barcagate" case. Bartomeu was the vice-president who had come to power when the former president Sandro Rosell was forced out due to the scandal over the signing of Neymar. Now he had resigned because he knew he could not win a vote of no confidence brought against him by supporters applying mechanisms that exist precisely to hold power to account; this was democracy in action at a club still owned by its members.

Bartomeu's legacy is a dreadful one; his successor is set to inherit a mess. During the campaign, Font described Barcelona as "a train heading straight for a wall at 200km/h". Now Laporta must somehow turn it around or at least apply the brakes.

On one level, it's tempting to joke that it is easy to be better than Bartomeu: don't get arrested, don't squander all your money and don't annoy Messi.

But there is a lot to be done. Barcelona have to find over €260m by the end of the season just to service

short-term debts and they're over €1bn in the red. They have a stadium redevelopment to begin and the biggest wage bill in Europe. They have a team to break up and rebuild, a coach whose future must be decided and a whole sporting directorate to restructure. In his acceptance speech, Laporta turned JFK to declare: "Think not of what Barcelona can do for you; think of what you can do for Barcelona."

They need all the help they can get. Laporta says that he has an "emergency plan", and will by necessity seek to renegotiate the club's financing. He has already brought in the former CEO of German company Media Markt. Mateu Alemany, previously president of Mallorca and managing director at Valencia, has joined to oversee the football side of the club. Jordi Cruyff looks likely to follow. Although there was little talk of big signings during the campaign – promising to buy superstars when you have no money could have been seen as an empty gesture – new players will be needed too, and there is a new generation of young footballers that excites. Perhaps inevitably, talk has turned to Erling Haaland.

**Game-changer... Laporta's giant banner outside the Bernabeu**

And then there is Messi, whose future conditions absolutely everything. He had tried to force his way out of the club last summer. There is an awareness that for him to stay, they will have to build a team that he considers capable of winning the Champions League – although one of the problems is that his salary is a barrier to doing so. Many cling to the hope that his problem was with Bartomeu, rather than Barcelona, and during the campaign the three candidates battled over ownership of him, claiming that they were the one best placed to convince him to stay.

**Voting...the image of Lionel Messi submitting his vote is displayed at the Nou Camp**

Messi never said which candidate he backed – he could have decided the elections in a single word – and instead kept his counsel. But those claims rang most true with Laporta, the president when he broke onto the scene. While Messi didn't say who he would vote for, he did turn out to vote for the first time and that might have been the best part of all, something to grab hold of, a glimpse perhaps of a future together, a demonstration that he cares at least.

As Laporta celebrated his return to the presidency, he insisted: "20 years ago today a boy named Leo Messi made his Barca Infantil B debut; today he voted with his son. That shows he loves Barca."

# MULTI-CLUB OWNERSHIP

**Steve Menary investigates the growing phenomenon…**

Multi-club ownership is a new buzzword in football, particularly in Europe, due to the activities of the City Football Group – owners of Manchester City – and the Red Bull Empire, which stretches from Leipzig and Salzburg to New York and Brazil.

MCO is an acronym that is set to be an increasing part of the footballing landscape, but how many clubs are interlinked across the globe and what are the long-term consequences?

In 2017, UEFA's research found 26 top-flight clubs across Europe involved in cross-ownership. By this February, the figure had leapt to 56 teams with 20 investors holding a portfolio of three

or more clubs including one in Europe. Overall, UEFA estimates there are 90 clubs with links and "just under" 50 shareholders owning two or more clubs.

"This phenomenon is a direct consequence of the economic growth the football industry experienced in the past decade and the effects this has had on the transfer market more specifically," says Fernando Roitman, founder of CIES Sports Intelligence, which has also researched the issue.

"Our data clearly shows that the wave of investments from China and South-East Asia that took place in 2016 and 2017 in particular has now nearly stopped altogether. This was replaced by an even bigger wave of investments from the US that is currently dominating club acquisitions in Europe."

CIES Sports Intelligence found 33 MCOs involving 88 clubs with 61 in Europe. Since 2018, 15 shareholders have become an MCO through the acquisition of the second club.

With companies buying, selling and even closing clubs – as Internazionale's owners Suning did to reigning Chinese Super League champions Jiangsu in February – almost weekly, measuring cross-ownership is difficult but *World Soccer*'s own research suggests the phenomenon is even larger.

*World Soccer* found 117 clubs controlled by 45 different MCO groups. These clubs are from 37 different countries across the globe, from Egypt to Armenia and the USA, and the largest number (87) are in Europe.

There are more English sides

## Other MCO Groups

| Group | Club | Country |
|---|---|---|
| **AEG** | Hammarby | Sweden |
| | LA Galaxy | USA |
| **Anton Zingarevich** | Botev Plovdiv | Bulgaria |
| | Fremad Amager | Denmark |
| **Aspire Foundation** | KAS Eupen | Belgium |
| | Cultural Leonesa | Spain |
| **Bolt Football Holdings** | Waasland-Beveren | Belgium |
| | Crystal Palace | England |
| **Core Sports Capital** | Austria Lustenau | Austria |
| | Vendsyssel FF | Denmark |
| | Clermont Foot | France |
| **Dai Yongge & Dai Xiu Li** | Reading | England |
| | Beijing Renhe | China |
| **Dmitry Rybolovlev** | Cercle Brugge | Belgium |
| | Monaco | Monaco/France |
| **Elliott Management** | Lille* | France |
| | Milan | Italy |
| **Evangelos Marinakis** | Nottingham Forest | England |
| | Olympiakos | Greece |
| **Flavio Becca** | Royal Excelsior Virton | Belgium |
| | Hesperange | Luxembourg |
| **Flyeralarm** | Admira | Austria |
| | Wurzburger Kickers | Germany |
| **Gerard Lopez** | Mouscron | Belgium |
| | Boavista | Portugal |
| **Miguel Angel Gil Marin** | Atletico Madrid | Spain |
| | Atletico Ottowa | Canada |
| | Atletico San Luis | Mexico |
| **Idan Ofer** | Famalicao | Portugal |
| | Atletico Madrid* | Spain |
| **Jason Levien** | Swansea City | Wales/England |
| | DC United | USA |
| **Jean-Michel Aulas** | Lyon | France |
| | OL Reign | USA |
| **Jenny Wang & Guo Guangchang** | Wolverhampton Wanderers | England |
| | Grasshoppers | Switzerland |
| **Jiang Lizhang** | Granada | Spain |
| | Chongqing Liangjiang Athletic | China |
| **Jim Ratcliffe** | Nice | France |
| | Lausanne Sports | Switzerland |
| **Joey Saputo** | Bologna | Italy |
| | CF Montreal | Canada/USA |
| **King Power** | OH Leuven | Belgium |
| | Leicester City | England |
| **Kyle Krause** | Parma | Italy |
| | Des Moines Menace | USA |
| **Lorinc Meszaros** | Osijek | Croatia |
| | Puskas Academia | Hungary |
| **Maged Sami** | Ergotelis | Greece |
| | Wadi Degla | Egypt |
| **Mansour Group** | Nordsjaelland | Denmark |
| | Right to Dream | Ghana |
| **Matthew Benham** | Midtjylland | Denmark |
| | Brentford | England |
| **MSP Sports Capital** | Estoril Praia | Portugal |
| | Alcorcon | Spain |
| **Oktay Ercan** | Westerlo | Belgium |
| | Boluspor | Turkey |
| **Peak6** | Helsingor | Denmark |
| | Dundalk | Rep. of Ireland |
| | Swansea City* | Wales/England |
| **Peter Lim** | Salford City* | England |
| | Valencia | Spain |
| **Pozzo family** | Watford | England |
| | Udinese | Italy |
| **Robert Platek** | Sonderjyske | Denmark |
| | Spezia | Italy |
| | Casa Pia | Portugal |
| **Rocco Benito Commisso** | Fiorentina | Italy |
| | New York Cosmos | USA |
| **Roland Duchatelet** | Carl Zeiss Jena | Germany |
| | Ujpest | Hungary |
| **Roman Gevorkyan** | Erawan | Armenia |
| | Uerdingen | Germany |
| | Siena | Italy |
| **Stan Kroenke** | Arsenal | England |
| | Colorado Rapids | USA |
| **Tony Bloom** | Union St Gilloise | Belgium |
| | Brighton & Hove Albion | England |
| **Total Sports Investments** | Pafos | Cyprus |
| | Riga | Latvia |
| | Rodina Moscow | Russia |

*Majority stake where known. *Denotes minority stake*

involved in MCOs than in any other country, but a dozen Belgium clubs have ownership links to other teams, while there are eight clubs in Denmark.

In France, where clubs have been weakened by a poorer TV deal, there are also now eight teams in MCOs including Chateauroux, which was recently acquired by Sheffield United owner Prince Abdullah's United World Group, but control and influence differ widely.

Majority ownership is prohibited in some countries. This prevented the NewCity Capital/Pacific Media Group (whose stable of clubs includes Barnsley in England and Esbjerg in Denmark) from buying Scottish League One side Partick Thistle. In places such as Austria and Germany investors can find ways around the rules.

"Ownership in the sense of a club as the property of a private person does not actually exist in Austrian sport," explains Marc Orlainsky from Austria sports integrity group Play Fair Code. "The Austrian Association Act, the OFB and the Austrian Bundesliga put a stop to this.

"However, as in Germany, a detour is made via constructions such as investments in the associations' corporations. According to tax laws, associations are obliged to outsource their professional operations to corporations. Due to their great economic power, these investors or major sponsors in some cases have a great influence on the association and thus in fact become 'owners'."

In Luxembourg, ownership is also banned and entrepreneur Flavio Becca established control first at F91 Dudelange and more recently at Hesperange by becoming a club sponsor.

"It's not about ownership but having decisive influence," says Alex Phillips, former head of governance and compliance at UEFA. "You could have 99 per cent of the shares in a club but no control because the club is in hock to the bank. It can be informal and work better."

Some investors hold stakes in different clubs without any majority control, such as fund manager Lindsell Train, which owns stakes in Celtic, Manchester United and Juventus and is not included in *World Soccer*'s figures.

Others take smaller stakes while also running other clubs such as Jordan Gardner, who has a minority holding in Championship side Swansea City, but greater control in Danish side Helsingor and Irish side Dundalk.

Sometimes the influence is not even official. Guo Guangchang's Fosun International controls English club Wolverhampton Wanderers, while his wife Jenny Wang has a 90 per cent stake in Swiss club Grasshoppers. There is no official link but two of Wolves' staff are understood to have moved to Zurich.

Some owners may only officially control a single club but have influence elsewhere, such as Marco Trabucchi and Andrew Zolotko, who own Latvian club Spartaks Jurmala and Danish side Vejle respectively and have significant influence at clubs in Eastern Europe.

Official MCO groups also differ widely. Former Japanese star Keisuke Honda's

**Two cities...Frank Lampard played for both Manchester City and New York City**

**Dominant...Red Bull Salzburg have won 11 Austrian titles since their takeover**

Soltilo group forges links between his own academies and low level clubs, while George Altirs' Capelli Sport leverages ownership to grow its sportswear business.

"The core of our business is manufacturing brands and products for youth clubs and the way we differentiate ourselves is by owning these professional clubs," says Jason Arnold, Capelli's vice-president for sports business.

Owners such as Core Sports Capital, the group set up by Sepp Blatter's former assistant Ahmet Schaefer, look to develop a common style of play. "The most important thing is to have a common philosophy," says Jerome Champagne, the group's managing director of international relations.

Set up with a fund of €10m, Core Sports controls clubs in Austria, Denmark and France and has an agreement with an academy in Mali.

Unofficial arrangements suit some clubs. Chelsea has a longstanding relationship with Dutch club Vitesse, and Bournemouth recently signed an agreement with Slovenian club NK Celje, but these partnerships do not have the same influence as ownership. "The problems with partnerships is they can be limited in terms of time, functions and relations," says Olivier Jarosz, managing partner at football consultancy Club Affairs. "The usual problem with football is the transition you have from the youth team to the first team. Often you are limited to the regulations of your country; maybe your reserve team can only play in the third division. So it's better to have a second club and a different pool of players.

**Vincent Tan...the Malaysian's ownership of Cardiff City has been controversial at times**

**In 2017, UEFA's research found 26 top-flight clubs across Europe involved in cross-ownership. By this February, the figure had leapt to 56 teams**

"The MCO model helps you be more reactive to regulatory changes. It's becoming a very dynamic market. It's not like City Football Group where you are buying to grow. Owners are now selling clubs to each other."

Buying and selling clubs and taking on feeder status can have a negative impact on fans that is rarely considered says Antonia Hagemann, head of fan governance group, Supporters Direct.

She explains: "From a business perspective, it makes sense as you don't have to pay agents or crazy transfer fees, you just develop players in your own clubs. It could abolish agents and ultimately the need for transfer fees, but you have parent and feeder clubs. And at the feeder clubs, you are never going to win anything because that's not the idea. If you become a feeder club, the danger is that they take your club away from you."

Despite these concerns, the MCO trend looks set to accelerate. RB subsidiaries Salzburg and Leipzig were cleared to play each other by UEFA in 2017 and small clubs across Europe are financially vulnerable due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Brexit may also play a part. "Post-Brexit regulations on the registration of players in England may further accelerate the acquisition of satellite clubs in other countries," adds Fernando Roitman of CIES but where will it end?

Olivier Jarosz sees an evolution that will terrify clubs and governing bodies across Europe.

"In the future, you could have these global clubs running their own competitions," says Jarosz, who was formerly head of club affairs for a decade at the European Club Association. "These clubs could start with some summer competitions and if they don't see enough advantage in UEFA's competitions, then maybe they will run their own competitions."

MCO may be only part of the evolving football universe but given the stature of some of the clubs involved that may be a realistic end game that could have significant consequences for world football.

**Lille & Milan...both clubs are now owned by Elliott Management**

Glenn Moore

# NWSL preview

## New season set to get underway amidst fresh threats to NWSL's supremacy from Europe

The fightback is on.

Having first battled the past – the history of failed US professional women's soccer leagues – then fought through a pandemic, the National Women's Soccer League (NWSL) has turned its focus towards a new threat. This one comes from across the Atlantic – from England, France and, in time, Spain, Italy and Germany too.

The sport's global reach is both an opportunity and a challenge for soccer in the US. There is an international market, but also worldwide competition. The financial power and football heritage of European clubs, and the glamour of the Champions League, are an alluring combination. While many NWSL-based players who went east this winter did so on loan to get matches in a COVID world, a significant number left for the longer term. This includes US internationals Tobin Heath and Christen Press at Manchester United, plus Abby Dahlkemper and probably Sam Mewis at Manchester City, though City team-mate Rose Lavelle seems likely to return to NWSL after the European campaign.

US Soccer Federation (USSF) if they play in NWSL. This is on top of their $100,000 contract with the national team and any associated bonuses (likely to be approaching $200,000 if the US win the Olympics).

However, a few US players are not on the list, notably Crystal Dunn and Lindsay Horan. This is because the two have signed three-year deals with Portland Thorns, a new option for players and clubs. Previously US internationals were contracted to USSF, giving both clubs and players limited control over their destiny. Players had been traded to teams they did not want to join (prompting a refusal to play in some cases) and clubs lost players they wanted to retain. This remains the situation in most cases but Dunn, Horan and Portland are now mutually committed.

As the players will still receive their national team contract and bonuses, their total remuneration will be broadly similar. The downside for Thorns is they are now paying the players' salaries, not NWSL. This is possible because NWSL now allow clubs to exceed the salary

**Homecoming...Rose Lavelle (L) and Sam Mewis (R) will likely return to NWSL after a year at Man. City**

> The sport's global reach is both an opportunity and a challenge for soccer in the US. There is an international market, but also worldwide competition

Mewis and Lavelle have been listed as "federation players" for this season, meaning they will receive roughly $100,000 salary from the

cap with "allocation money", up to $400,000 this season. This was brought in to combat the growing threat from Europe. It used to be only Lyon

**Challenge Cup... Rachel Daly of Houston Dash lifts last year's trophy**

that lured US internationals across the Atlantic, limiting the loss to one or two a season. Now major clubs from the Premier League and La Liga are seriously investing, with Serie A and the Bundesliga in the wings. In a sign of the rapid growth, England's WSL have just brokered a three-year TV deal estimated to be worth over £20m, the biggest in women's football.

Allocation money means Dunn, who has played for Chelsea, and Horan, who had several seasons with Paris Saint-Germain, stay in the US. It may also be a factor in the likely arrival at OL Reign from parent club Lyon of French duo Dzsenifer Marozsan and Sarah Bouhaddi, delayed a year by COVID. While Reign await the latter, California-born former England goalkeeper Karen Bardsley has signed on loan from Manchester City. Lavelle, if she returns to NWSL, will do so with Reign after her rights were traded from Sky Blue. Another tyro leaving the New Jersey club is Mallory Pugh, who joins Chicago Red Stars.

With back-to-back shield and play-off winners North Carolina Courage having lost half their team since the last regular

**Holders...North Carolina Courage won the last NWSL Shield in 2019**

season, both Portland and Chicago will hope to take the crown. Picking a winner in an Olympic year however, especially after the truncated 2020 season, is tricky.

The season got underway on April 9 with the second running of the NWSL Challenge Cup. Instituted last year to provide some action in lieu of the cancelled regular season it proved such a success it was retained as a curtain-raiser. Houston Dash, who unexpectedly won last year's tournament, hosted the opener against Chicago. Split into two groups (East and West) the 21-match competition ends with a final between the group winners on May 8.

The regular season follows on May 15, runs through the Olympics, and concludes on October 30. An expanded six-team play-off concludes with a championship-deciding match on November 20. The combined schedule provides each team with a record minimum 28 matches. A side reaching both finals could play 32.

The arrival of Racing Louisville brings NWSL back to ten clubs after three years with nine, while Utah Royals have morphed back into Kansas City. Angel City join next year, but Sacramento's inclusion is in doubt after a major backer withdrew. However, there is confidence in the league's future elsewhere with the trend of celebrity investors now including tennis player Naomi Osaka (Courage) and presidential daughters Chelsea Clinton and Jenna Bush Hager (Washington Spirit). Whether the New World's glitz will be enough to see off the Old World's cash and cachet remains to be seen.

# Round-up

**Ferroviaria...champions of South America**

### CAMILA MAKES HISTORY

Lindsay Camila became the first female coach to oversee success in the Copa Libertadores Femenina when she guided Ferroviaria to a 2-1 victory over Colombia's America de Cali in Buenos Aires. It was the Brazilian club's second title. Camila, who played in Europe for Lyon and Boavista, took over in January.

Both semi-finals were settled on penalties with Ferroviaria beating Universidad de Chile in an 18-kick shootout and America de Cali putting out holders Corinthians.

### RIISE, GRAINGER APPOINTED

Hege Riise, an Olympic winner as a player with Norway and an assistant coach with the US, will manage Team GB at the Olympics. Riise's experience in the competition was cited as a key factor in the choice, along with her impressive start as interim England coach. Canadian Rhian Wilkinson will assist. Leaving the FA is staff coach Gemma Grainger, who will become manager of Wales.

### HEYMAN ON TOP DOWN UNDER

Michelle Heyman regained her status as the leading W-League scorer, overhauling Sam Kerr. A brace for Canberra United against Perth Glory took her to 72 goals. The 32-year-old former Australia international, who returned to action after a year out as a TV pundit, is one of the few stars in a campaign hit by an exodus of Matildas to Europe and a shortage of overseas players due to COVID-enforced travel restrictions.

Last year's finalists Sydney FC were the first club to qualify for the play-offs, while defending champions Melbourne City failed to do so after a torrid season with one win in their opening nine matches.

**Hat-trick hero...Sam Kerr with the WSL Cup**

### KERR'S BLUES RETAIN TROPHY

Kerr is now in England, and struck a hat-trick as Chelsea successfully defended the League Cup defeating Bristol City 6-0. History was made when City's Matt Beard became the first manager on maternity cover to take charge at a domestic final, with regular coach Tanya Oxtoby having taken maternity leave.

**Repeat...Lyon and PSG met in last year's semis**

### FRENCH FACE-OFF, HARDER REUNION

In a repeat of last season's semi-final, the Champions League draw paired French rivals Lyon and Paris Saint-Germain at the quarter-final stage with the winner due to meet Manchester City or Barcelona. The other half of the draw pitted Chelsea's Pernille Harder against her former club Wolfsburg with the winner meeting Bayern Munich or Rosengard. The semi-finals are April 24/25 and May 1/2 with the final in Gothenburg, Sweden, on May 16.

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United States

JAMES NALTON

# Beckham continues to build a star-studded Inter Miami

## But LAFC, Columbus Crew and Seattle Sounders are among the teams to beat

Already one of the biggest leagues in the world, Major League Soccer expands to 27 teams for its 26th year which sees a return to a full schedule following an abridged 2020 season.

As well as welcoming a new club, Austin FC, there's a rebrand in Montreal and new coaching hires across the league as clubs look to improve on and off the pitch.

All eyes will be on returning stars Carlos Vela of Los Angeles FC and Atlanta United's Josef Martinez, who missed the majority of the 2020 season through injury.

Both have already etched their name in the MLS history books. In 2018, Martinez broke the record for goals scored in the regular season with 31, only for Vela to break it again in 2019, scoring 34.

The 14 goals scored by Vela's team-mate Diego Rossi were enough to claim the Golden Boot in the truncated 2020 campaign, but despite LAFC regularly boasting some of the league's outstanding players and winning the Supporters' Shield in 2019, they are yet to taste MLS Cup success – something they will be hoping to put right.

Though Atlanta have Martinez back in the fold along with a highly-rated new manager – former Manchester United defender Gabriel Heinze – there's still a hesitance to predict success for them in 2021, but if everything clicks they could be a force to be reckoned with.

The trend of bringing South American

**Changes...David Beckham is taking a more hands-on role at Inter Miami**

Return...Carlos Vela

Dangerous... Josef Martinez

Arrival...Brenner

talent to the league has continued, with FC Cincinnati's Brazilian marquee signing Brenner the most high profile thanks to the striker's $13 million fee.

Other examples include Colombians Jader Obrian and Christian Mafla signing for dark horses FC Dallas and New England Revolution respectively, Atlanta adding Argentine midfielder Santiago Sosa, and their rivals Orlando City signing Alexandre Pato, a more familiar Brazilian name likely to replace Daryl Dike who's impressing on loan at Barnsley in the English Championship.

Though Atlanta are considered Orlando's main rivals, a new feud may emerge in Florida between Orlando and 2020 expansion side Inter Miami.

It was a really disappointing debut season for the Miami club part-owned by David Beckham, but changes have been made. Beckham is taking a more hands-on role, Phil Neville is the new head coach and Chris Henderson arrives as sporting director.

If Miami can reorganise in 2021, Gonzalo Higuain could crash the Martinez and Vela party in the scoring charts, while Scotsman Lewis Morgan will look to continue his good form and the signing of Brazilian midfielder Gregore could be key.

The most genuine MLS rivalry exists in the West between Seattle Sounders and Portland Timbers. It's a rivalry older than MLS itself, dating back to the clubs' NASL meetings in the 1970s.

Portland tasted success last season in the MLS Is Back Tournament while Seattle lost out to Columbus Crew in the MLS Cup final. Both will have high expectations in 2021, as will last season's Western Conference leaders Sporting Kansas City.

Newcomers Austin FC immediately joined the South American transfer trend, signing Argentine midfielder Tomas Pochettino. Though they are the lone expansion club, the teams who joined last year, Miami and Nashville SC, still have a newness about them as a result of last season's shortened nature due to COVID and the subsequent lack of support in the stands.

**It was a really disappointing debut season for the Miami club part-owned by David Beckham, but changes have been made**

COVID travel restrictions also mean the three Canadian teams will play their early home games in the US. Vancouver Whitecaps will share a stadium with Real Salt Lake; the team formerly known as Montreal Impact, who have rebranded to CF Montreal, will share with Miami; and regular challengers Toronto FC and their 2020 MLS MVP Alejandro Pozuelo begin in Orlando.

For last year's Supporters' Shield winners, Philadelphia Union, much will depend on how they cope without homegrown stars Mark McKenzie and Brenden Aaronson, whose performances earnt moves to Europe. Meanwhile, no team has won back-to-back MLS Cups since LA Galaxy in 2012. This is the task facing Columbus Crew, but the well-run Ohio club should be a force once again.

Galaxy remain one of the biggest names in the league despite poor showings in recent years, and will be hoping to live up to that name this year with former Toronto coach Greg Vanney at the helm, while over on the east coast the New York clubs, Red Bulls and City, cannot be underestimated.

With 27 teams and a diverse group of players, there's potential for storylines and upsets across the continent, and the unpredictability of MLS remains one of its charms.

Tough...no team has won back-to-back MLS Cups since LA Galaxy in 2012

India

JOHN DUERDEN

# Mumbai City celebrate winning rare double

## Sergio Lobera's side strike late as the City Football Group era gets up and running in dramatic style

Pep Guardiola had to send two congratulatory messages to Mumbai City in March. The first came as the member of the City Football Group (CFG) stable pipped ATK Mohun Bagan to first place in the Indian Super League (ISL). The same two teams met in the Championship play-off final on March 13, and Mumbai left it late once more to win 2-1 to give CFG another title success in Asia to go along with the 2019 J.League championship delivered by Yokohama F. Marinos.

It was harsh however on ATK who, despite being the best team for almost the entire season and for much of the Championship play-off final, ended up with nothing. The Kolkata club had led the 11-team table from the start but dropped five points in the last two games and Mumbai finished first on goal difference. Taking top spot means automatic qualification for the 2022 AFC Champions League but did not change much in terms of the four-team play-off series.

Winner...Bipin Singh nets the decisive goal deep into the second half

Credit: @MumbaiCityFC Twitter

Both teams made it through the semi-finals to meet in the title decider. Mohun Bagan took the lead through Australian striker David Williams but an own goal levelled the scoreline. After 90 minutes Mumbai midfielder Bipin Singh, an ex-ATK player, took advantage of a catastrophic goalkeeping error to get the all-important goal.

ATK probably won't take solace in providing an exciting end to the ISL in its first season as the official top tier of Indian football as the tournament, established in 2014, leapfrogged above the older I-League. Given that all the games took place without fans in a bubble, it was not an ideal season. There may be worse places than Goa to be stuck for four or five months but when players are only allowed out of hotel rooms to eat, to train and to play, it can be, like East Bengal coach Robbie Fowler said, "essentially a prison".

**Robbie Fowler didn't enjoy his first season much, and it was almost fitting that it ended with a 6-5 defeat to bottom club Odisha**

Fowler would have appreciated that the season was, partly at least, a tale of two rival strikers who crossed swords in Australia and now India.

Fijian star Roy Krishna finished this season on top of the goalscoring standings for the third time in a row. The first came in Australia in 2018-19 when he played for Wellington Phoenix, New Zealand's representatives in the A-League. Such form earned a move to Kolkata and ATK. In 2020, he was top scorer once more and won the ISL title to boot. His exploits in this campaign were just as impressive but he will have to settle for being named as "Hero of the League".

Facing him in the final was Mumbai's Adam Le Fondre. The Englishman, with spells at Reading, Wolves and Bolton Wanderers on his CV, was second to Krishna in Australia in the 2018-19 charts but won the title with Sydney FC. He finished second individually again in Australia last season behind Jamie Maclaren but took the title again. Now with Mumbai City, Le Fondre is happy to finish below Krishna in the goalscoring standings once more as the 34-year-old now has a third successive championship medal.

It was a rare British victory however. Three coaches from the United Kingdom and six from Spain started the season and the latter group came out better, with Sergio Lobera of Mumbai and Antonio Lopez Habas

**Champions...Mumbai City celebrate winning the play-off final**

*Credit: @MumbaiCityFC Twitter*

contesting the final.

The Brits all finished in the bottom half. Owen Coyle did best. The former Bolton, Burnley and Blackburn Rovers coach impressed with Chennaiyin last season, but wasn't quite able to take an inconsistent but promising Jamshedpur into the top four and play-offs. Robbie Fowler didn't enjoy his first season much, and it was almost fitting that it ended with a 6-5 defeat to bottom club Odisha – a club that fired their British manager Stuart Baxter in February for making an offensive remark and replaced him with former Bournemouth, Fulham and Republic of Ireland goalkeeper Gerry Peyton, who lasted just two games.

Under Fowler, East Bengal ended in ninth but that was perhaps to be expected after the team joined the league late and was, to some extent, hastily put together. After five games and one point, it could have been worse. There was an improvement, but Fowler made more headlines for his attacks on referees than results. In the end he was hit with a four-match ban for repeated misconduct towards match officials. One newspaper said the job was too big for the ex-Liverpool man.

It remains to be seen if he can challenge next season, whether ATK Mohun Bagan can pick themselves up from the disappointment and whether Guardiola will be recording more videos.

*Credit: @A1F1E9 Twitter*

**Celebrating... Adam Le Fondre**

**Struggled... Robbie Fowler**

*Credit: East Bengal*

# The month in numbers

The facts and stats that have caught our eye in the world of football this month...

## 257

Number of Manchester City goals scored by Sergio Aguero when he announced he would be leaving the club this summer.

## 3

The United States Men's team failed to qualify for the Olympics for the third time in a row after losing 2-1 to Honduras in the CONCACAF semi-finals.

## 4

Dinamo Zagreb coach Zoran Mamic was handed a four-year prison sentence for embezzling funds from player sales.

## 1

In the Netherlands' 2-0 win over Latvia, Stephanie Frappart made history by becoming the first female referee to take charge of a men's World Cup qualifier.

Upset... Luxembourg's Gerson Rodrigues celebrates scoring in Dublin

## 1,785

Number of days between Zlatan Ibrahmovic's 116th cap and his 117th after the Sweden striker came out of retirement.

## 18

Every top-flight club in Belgium voted in favour of merging with the Eredivisie to form a new BeNe Liga.

Manchester City legend...Aguero

## £235m

The value of Manchester United's new five-year shirt sponsorship deal with TeamViewer, the biggest shirt-only deal in the Premier League.

## 13

Prior to their shock 1-0 victory over the Republic of Ireland, Luxembourg's last qualifying win away from home came 13 years ago – a 2-1 win in Switzerland.

## 10

That defeat to Luxembourg meant that Stephen Kenny had failed to win any of his first ten matches in charge of the Republic of Ireland.

## 3

16-year-old Danubio striker Nicolas Siri made history by scoring three goals in a Uruguayan league match – breaking Pele's record as the youngest-ever hat-trick scorer in professional football.

## 5,620

Manchester City plan to install 5,620 rail seats in order to allow safe standing at the Etihad.

## 6

Nick Pope is the first England goalkeeper to keep a clean sheet in each of his first six appearances.

## 125

By playing his 125th international match, Northern Ireland skipper Steven Davis matched Peter Shilton's record as Britain's most-capped male player.

## 8

Denmark's 8-0 victory over Moldova was their biggest-ever win in World Cup qualifying.

## 1

New rules in Brazil's Serie A means that from the new season, starting in May, clubs can only make one managerial change per season.

## 767

Lionel Messi matched Xavi's all-time Barcelona appearance record in the 4-1 La Liga win over Huesca.

Record breaker... Leo Messi scores against Huesca

## £1m

The value of Ollie Watkins' England debut to Brentford and Exeter, who each land a share of the sum after international performance clauses were inserted into his contract before joining Aston Villa.

Debut goal...Ollie Watkins in action v San Marino

## Anguilla

STEVE MENARY

Thrashed...Anguilla line up ahead of their 10-0 defeat to Guatemala in 2019

# Stern at the wheel

### New coach Stern John at the heart of a new era for Anguilla

After years as an after-thought, football in Anguilla finally appears to have some direction.

The British overseas territory with a population of 15,000 played sporadically after joining FIFA in 1996, and nine years ago *World Soccer* revealed that half the clubs could not vote and had not seen proper financial accounts for three years.

Then-AFA president Raymond Guishard has since been replaced by former national team player Girdon Connor and football on the island is on the up.

A league that once had just six teams now has 11 clubs and the recruitment of two Caribbean legends, Stern John and Brent Sancho of Trinidad & Tobago, to lead the national team has revitalised expectations.

John, who played in England for a decade and is Trinidad's record goalscorer, is the manager and moved to Anguilla in November to start training.

"We went into it together as there's a lot of things that we need to do," says John. "Just getting together for a few days before a game is no good. That's why we saw the scores we had. We are building from ground zero. It's a work in progress."

In the past two years, Anguilla have been thumped 10-0 in Guatemala and 15-0 in a friendly in Trinidad & Tobago, where John was in the hosts' dug-out as assistant manager.

Stern John...the Anguilla coach at the 2006 World Cup

Anguilla only scored in one game during that period, with London-born student Kyle Lake-Bryan, who was most recently at Hampton & Richmond, netting in a 3-2 home defeat to Puerto Rico. "We can compete with other nations which has been proven in the Puerto Rico game, showing we are more than capable," says Lake-Bryan.

> In the past two years, Anguilla have been thumped 10-0 in Guatemala and 15-0 in a friendly in Trinidad & Tobago

Anguilla has a strong expat community living around Slough in west London, with many players featuring for clubs in the English non-league pyramid. A disrupted and now cancelled league programme left those players lacking game-time though.

Lake-Bryan missed out on a place in John's first preliminary squad of 29 players, but cousins Luke Paris and Calvin Morgan – who play for English non-league side Langley – returned. New faces amongst the other eight overseas players included Collen Warner from Colorado Rapids and brothers Jan-Willem and Brian-Paul Tesselaar, who both play in the Netherlands.

John and Sancho are looking at more players in Europe, but with players on the island training daily since November, at least half of Anguilla's squad will remain local. "Local players will definitely get their chance," says John.

The Anguilla league started in the first week of March and grassroots development has generated a pool of 30-40 eligible players. "We now have eight football academies in Anguilla and the AFA put their focus currently on several grassroots programs, this will definitely help us to develop more good players for the future," says Pascal Schmidt, secretary at Uprising FC. "But to compete at international level we also need our overseas based players."

John and Sancho will continue their search overseas and shifting their recent home World Cup qualifiers to Miami due to the coronavirus pandemic did not help. Defeats to Dominican Republic in Florida (6-0) and Barbados in Santo Domingo (1-0) emphasised the tough task ahead. But John remains positive: "We need to be able to compete and being realistic, we need to get a result against Dominica."

If Anguilla can achieve that in June, it will at least be a sign that John is steering them in the right direction.

Uprising FC...one of 11 clubs in the Anguilla domestic league

FEBRUARY 27-MARCH 26, 2021

# Global diary

*Stories from the four corners of the football world*

### Saturday February 27

**GERMANY:** Jadon Sancho becomes the youngest Bundesliga player to get 50 assists following Dortmund's 3-0 win over Arminia Bielefeld. Elsewhere, Alexander Sorloth scores a 93rd-minute winner for RB Leipzig in their 3-2 comeback victory against Borussia Monchengladbach.

### Sunday February 28

**INDIA:** Mumbai City overhaul ATK Mohun Bagan in the final match of the ISL's regular season to win the League Winners' Shield.

### Monday March 1

**BOSNIA:** In the Sarajevo derby, FK Sarajevo and Zeljeznicar draw 0-0.

### Wednesday March 3

**ITALY:** Lorenzo Tonelli rescues a point for Sampdoria in the Genoa derby as the two sides draw 1-1. Off the pitch, Juventus sign on-loan midfielder Weston McKennie for €18.5 million from Schalke.

### Thursday March 4

**ARGENTINA:** In the delayed final of the 2019 Argentina Super Cup, River Plate thrash Racing Club 5-0 in the first-ever match played at the brand-new Madre de Cities stadium, in Santiago del Estero.
**THAILAND:** BG Pathum United seal the Thai League 1 title with a 2-0 win over Sukothai.

### Friday March 5

**MALAYSIA:** Reigning league champions Johor Darul Ta'zim begin the new season by beating Kedah Darul Aman 2-0 in the 2021 Charity Shield.

### Saturday, March 6

**AUSTRALIA:** Melbourne City thrash rivals Melbourne Victory 6-0 away from home in the A-League.
**UZBEKISTAN:** Pakhtakor win their first silverware under new coach Pieter Huistra, beating Nasaf 1-0 in the Uzbekistan Super Cup.
**GERMANY:** In *Der Klassiker*, Bayern recover from two early Erling Haaland goals to defeat Borussia Dortmund 4-2, scoring twice in the dying minutes.

Canada

MARTIN DEL PALACIO LANGER

# Complications arise in Canada

## Toronto FC are announced as the country's representatives in the CONCACAF Champions League amid difficulties

2021 has been quite an eventful year so far for Canadian football.

After the 2020 Canadian Championship, scheduled to take place between June and September, was suspended due to the COVID pandemic, this year everything was poised for the return to activity, but circumstances have made it more complicated than it seemed.

In principle, the winner of this tournament, which would be played by 11 teams – the three Canadian representatives in MLS and the eight teams of the Canadian Premier League – would be the country's flag bearer in the CONCACAF Champions League. However, the cancellation of the tournament forced plans to be modified.

Thus, last August, Canada Soccer decided that, to determine the Canadian club in the continental competition, a one-game final would be played on March 20 between the two best teams of the year – Forge FC, winner of the CPL's Island Games in the summer, and Toronto FC, the Canadian club that best finished the first phase of the revised MLS schedule.

Everything seemed to be ready but just ten days before the date, Canada Soccer released a statement announcing the postponement of the match to a date to be determined, so that the fans

Challenge...Toronto FC face Leon in the CONCACAF Champions League

Leader...Toronto FC captain Michael Bradley

of both teams could be in the stands, "in accordance with all public health and safety measures".

In addition, due to Forge's inability to train – due to COVID restrictions – and the start of the Champions League in April, Canada Soccer also announced that the country's representatives in the continental competition would be Toronto FC. In exchange, Forge will host the Canadian Championship final when a date is finally set for the match.

After the statement, what remains to be decided is the competition format and date on which Canadian football will resume activity. The idea is that the next Canadian Premier League season will kick-off on May 22. However, for that to happen, the tournament must have the approval of the Canadian authorities based on the state of the COVID pandemic in the country.

As vaccination in the country is barely accelerating, it seems unlikely that the tournament can be played on the scheduled dates, and there are several versions afloat of how and when the competition could resume. The most realistic seems to be the idea of two "bubble" tournaments, one in the east and one in the west, starting on July 1, with the winners meeting in the semi-finals at a later date.

What is known with complete certainty is that the Canadian representatives in the CONCACAF Champions League will begin their participation in the continental tournament against the most difficult rivals possible, the Mexican champions Leon, in April. The road ahead does not get any easier, with the next opponents most likely to be Mexican powerhouse Cruz Azul, who are regarded as big favourites over the Haitian side Arcahaie, their rivals in the last 16.

It seems like mission impossible for Toronto FC, given that Mexican clubs have completely dominated the tournament for the past 15 years and are once again widely favoured to win the title in this edition.

In addition to Cruz Azul and Leon, Mexico will also send two of its most powerful teams to the tournament – America, the record winner of the continental tournament with seven titles, and Monterrey, who have won the CONCACAF crown four times.

The picture is completed by four more MLS teams (Columbus Crew, Philadelphia Union, Atlanta United and Portland Timbers), two Costa Rican sides (Alajuelense and Deportivo Saprissa), two Hondurans (Olimpia and Marathon), a Nicaraguan (Real Esteli) and Atletico Pantoja of the Dominican Republic.

The teams will play a knockout tournament from April, when the round of 16 kicks off, until the final, currently scheduled for October 28.

**It seems like mission impossible for Toronto FC, given that Mexican clubs have dominated the tournament for the past 15 years**

Never has a Canadian team clinched the title, although Toronto FC came agonisingly close back in 2018, when, led by Italian forward Sebastian Giovinco and Canadian Jonathan Osorio, they took Mexican side Guadalajara to penalties, but ended up failing to clear that last hurdle. In 2015, Montreal Impact also reached the final, but were comprehensively defeated by America 5-3 on aggregate.

Led by legendary American midfielder Michael Bradley and Spaniard Alejandro Pozuelo, Toronto FC will try to emulate those past successes, although the first step will be to make people forget what happened in 2019, when, against all odds, they were eliminated in the first round by Independiente de La Chorrera of Panama by an aggregate scoreline of 5-1.

Agonising... Toronto FC came close to winning the CONCACAF Champions League in 2018

Celebrations...Mexican giants Club America have won the CONCACAF Champions League a record seven times

Africa

MARK GLEESON

# The Gambia and Comoros make AFCON history

## Tiny nations qualify for their first major tournament

History-making... the Comoros squad

A cascade of qualifiers emerged day after day as the final two rounds of the Africa Cup of Nations preliminaries were played over seven successive days in a dramatic finish to the campaign.

But the major headline makers did so early in the week, as the Comoros Islands and the Gambia both qualified on the same day, reaching the finals for the first time in extraordinary achievements for two of the continent's smallest countries.

The Comoros had gone through the first four Group G games without defeat, including an away win in Togo and holding mighty Egypt at home, and needed only a home draw against Togo to book their place in the finals with a game to spare. This was achieved in a goalless clash against under strength opposition, not that it bothered the thousands who celebrated around the island archipelago.

Gambia won at home to hapless Angola, with FC Zurich striker Assan Ceesay scoring the only goal of the game in a huge breakthrough for a country who have been steadily improving over the years. Almost all their players are now drawn from clubs in Europe, diligently scouted by coach Tom Saintfiet, who was rewarded with a new five-year contract after qualification.

Equatorial Guinea, Malawi and Sudan were the other unexpected qualifiers, snatching their places with vital home wins.

Skipper Emilio Nsue scored a dramatic last-minute winner for Equatorial Guinea to see them past their closest challengers Tanzania, while Richard Mbulu's diving header as Malawi edged Uganda, usurping them in the Group B standings, was worthy of winning any game, never mind clinching qualification for the Flames for only the third time.

Sudan upset South Africa with a 2-0 win in Khartoum to knock out the 2010 World Cup hosts.

The Cape Verde Islands and Mauritania did it the hard way by winning away – against opponents who were looking for victory themselves – and Ethiopia qualified for only the second time in almost 40 years despite losing their last game.

They did the hard work by hammering Madagascar 4-0 at home in their penultimate qualifier, but still only made it with a dollop of good fortune.

Ethiopia were easily beaten in the Ivory Coast on the last day, leaving Madagascar to win at home to bottom-placed Niger. However, veteran goalkeeper

Work to do... Cameroon must improve before they host the tournament

Missing out...South Africa's Themba Zwane will not feature at the AFCON finals

Kassaly Daouda proved immovable and the game ended goalless, leaving the Malagasy distraught and Ethiopia with a complimentary ticket to the big show.

FIFA's edict that clubs did not have to release players who faced quarantine on their return from international duty threatened a wholesale haemorrhaging of squads for the last two rounds of qualification, exacerbated by the French league's decision that Ligue 1 and Ligue 2 clubs should not allow players outside the European Union.

That stance softened, however, after negotiations with FIFA and the Confederation of African Football and while there were many absentees, none had a major impact on the games.

Indeed, Mohamed Salah appeared for the first time in two years for his country and scored twice against the Comoros in Cairo, as Egypt qualified for a record 25th time. Liverpool team-mate Naby Keita captained Guinea as they booked their place by beating 1-0 Mali at home, and Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang was on hand as Gabon thumped the Democratic Republic of Congo 3-0 in their penultimate Group D game to also qualify.

**The Comoros Islands and the Gambia both qualified on the same day, reaching the finals for the first time in extraordinary achievements for two of the continent's smallest countries**

But there was a furore over whether Cameroon's federation has sent the call-up to Bayern Munich's Eric Choupo-Moting to an incorrect e-mail address, unconvincingly denied a few days later by the next tournament hosts.

Cameroon also participated in the qualifiers but look as if they have much work to do ahead of January's tournament if they are to prove competitive, losing 3-1 in the Cape Verde Islands and then being held at home by ten-man Rwanda in their last two Group F ties.

Holders Algeria, Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Egypt, Morocco, Nigeria, Senegal and Tunisia all finished unbeaten in their six group games.

Algeria looked as strong as they were in winning the 2019 edition and finished with a convincing 5-0 thumping of Botswana – a 22nd match without defeat for the Fennecs – for a total of 19 goals in the campaign, an average of more than three per match.

Victor Osimhen ended as the top scorer with five goals in as many matches for Nigeria, who ended their campaign with a 1-0 away win at Benin and then 3-0 success at home to Lesotho.

A date for the draw has not yet been announced and, at the time of writing, one place is still to be confirmed. Benin refused to play their decisive qualifier in Sierra Leone, after local authorities declared six of the visiting players COVID-19 positive.

Players initially would not leave the team bus after being told the six were ineligible for the crucial Group L match in Freetown, where Sierra Leone needed to win while Benin required only a draw for a place in next January's finals.

"A shame for African football what is currently happening, we hope the Confederation of African Football (CAF) will take responsibility and take action," said a tweet from the Benin Football Federation.

Negotiations led to the kick-off being put back three hours but the revised time passed without play starting. The Benin federation later said its players had returned to the hotel after "being blocked on the bus".

Earlier this year, matches in African club competitions were dogged by players from visiting teams being disqualified by test results, some delivered just before kick-off, leading to accusations that testing for the novel coronavirus was being manipulated to offer home teams an advantage.

Holders...Algeria will be favourites for January's tournament

➤ **MAURITANIA:** In the final of the Under-20 AFCON, Ghana beat Uganda 2-0 thanks to a Daniel Afriyie Barnieh double.

## Sunday March 7

**BRAZIL:** Palmeiras win the Copa do Brazil after defeating Gremio 2-0 in the second leg of the final, sealing a 3-0 win on aggregate.
**QATAR:** Al Sadd lift the 2020-21 Qatar Stars League title with four rounds left to play after defeating Umm Salal 3-0.
**OMAN:** Khalid Al Hajri's hat-trick inspires Dhofar Club to a 5-1 win over Al Suwaiq in the final of the Sultan Qaboos Cup.
**SPAIN:** In the Madrid derby, Karim Benzema rescues a point for Real, scoring in the 88th minute after Atleti had led through Luis Suarez.

## Monday March 8

**ITALY:** Internazionale secure a valuable win at the top of Serie A, beating Atalanta 1-0 at the San Siro.
**ARGENTINA:** Velez Sarsfield's unbeaten start to the season is brought to a crushing halt, losing 7-1 at home to Boca Juniors.

## Wednesday March 10

**BRAZIL:** The Maracana stadium will be renamed in honour of the country's record goalscorer. Its new name will be the Edson Arantes do Nascimento – Rei Pele stadium.

## Friday March 12

**COLOMBIA:** America defeat Deportivo 2-0 in the Cali derby, with former Dortmund striker Adrian Ramos scoring both goals.
**GERMANY:** Shortly after signing a new contract at Bayern Munich, young midfielder Jamal Musiala officially switches his international eligibility from England to Germany.

## Saturday March 13

**JORDAN:** Newly-promoted Al Jalil upset reigning champions Al Wehdat in the Jordan Shield Cup final.
**INDIA:** Bipin Singh's 90th-minute goal completes an ISL double for Mumbai City, as the League Shield winners defeat ATK Mohun Bagan 2-1 in the play-off final.
**RUSSIA:** Spartak Moscow recover from going behind to defeat rivals Dynamo 2-1, with Victor Moses on the scoresheet for the winners.

## Sunday March 14

**BRAZIL:** In the Fla-Flu derby, Fluminense defeat Flamengo 1-0 thanks to an Igor Juliao winner. ➤

Yemen

JOHN DUERDEN

# Yemen's six-year wait continues

## But the success of last year's Recovery Championship has offered some hope

When football stopped all over the world last year, it was just situation normal in Yemen. The league there was suspended in late 2014 as war spread around the country but, after six years without the sport, the Yemen Football Association (YFA) announced in January that it planned to restart in mid-February. Renewed fighting put it back to early March which didn't happen either. The outlook is still uncertain but the will is there.

If all was well then 34 teams would be in the top two tiers but the FA quickly realised that would not be the case. A number of clubs have refused to participate until it is safer but, by the first week of March, just 12 teams had submitted their registrations.

There are obviously bigger issues than those of administration after more than six years of fighting and misery. The capital Sanaa has been in the hands of the rebel Houthis since early on in the conflict that has devastated a country that was already one of the poorest in the Arab world. It is no longer just a battle between government forces and the rebels. Over time other groups have become involved and seized territory. It is, according to the United Nations, the biggest humanitarian crisis in the world.

No league has meant that there has been no way for players to earn a living for six years. Some went overseas, with Qatar a popular destination, but some stayed and tried to find other means of employment.

Others met a far worse fate. In December, national team players Ali Al Saudi and Abdullah Arif Abd Rabbo were killed, and the same month former player Nasser Al Rimi died during a shelling as he coached children. Stadiums have been targeted by troops and it is estimated that about 80% are unusable.

In December, Yemeni sports minister Nayef Al Bakri said the Houthis were responsible for the sport industry losing $2.8 billion and, although the truth may be the first casualty of war, there is little doubt that facilities are in a poor state.

Most stadiums wouldn't be used in the short-term at least. Some teams that are ready to restart have made it clear that they are not going to travel in unsafe parts of the country which makes it tricky. With stadiums spread around over territories ruled by three different authorities, it does not leave many left.

Another issue is that of money. Clubs barely have two rials to rub together. It is not a surprise then that the necessary paperwork is slow in being done, stadiums are not ready, and players have looked for alternative employment.

**Passion...Yemen supporters cheer at the Arabian Gulf Cup in Qatar in 2019**

➤ **ARGENTINA:** The *Superclasico* ends in a 1-1 draw, as Boca Juniors and River Plate both have players sent off at the Bombonera.
**SPAIN:** Sevilla end their four-match winless run by beating Real Betis 1-0 in the Seville derby, thanks to a winner from Youssef En-Nesyri.
**ENGLAND:** In the North London derby, Arsenal recover from an Erik Lamela rabona goal to win 2-1, courtesy of strikes from Martin Odegaard and Alexandre Lacazette. Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang makes headlines by being dropped for arriving to the ground late.

### Monday March 15

**MEXICO:** America win the Mexican *Super Clasico* 3-0, ensuring that they keep pace with league leaders Cruz Azul, while Chivas slip further towards the bottom of the table.
**USA:** Valencia midfielder Yunus Musah commits his international future to USA, having previously represented England at youth level.

### Tuesday March 16

**PALESTINE:** Shabab Al Khaleel are crowned champions of the West Bank Premier League.

### Wednesday March 17

**FRANCE:** In the French Cup, PSG beat Ligue 1 title rivals Lille 3-0 thanks to a Kylian Mbappe brace.

### Thursday March 18

**EUROPE:** In the Europa League, Slavia Prague's 2-0 win over Rangers is overshadowed by accusations of racism made against defender Ondrej Kudela. Meanwhile, Mislav Orsic scores a stunning hat-trick as Dinamo Zagreb knock out Tottenham Hotspur 3-2 on aggregate.

### Saturday March 20

**ENGLAND:** Manchester City reach the FA Cup semi-final with a 2-0 win at Everton, and they're joined by Southampton who beat south coast rivals Bournemouth 3-0.
**GERMANY:** Robert Lewandowski scores his 40th goal of the season as Bayern thrash Stuttgart 4-0, in spite of Alphonso Davies' red card.

### Sunday March 21

**ENGLAND:** Leicester City reach their first FA Cup semi-final in 39 years with a 3-1 home win over

**Crisis...children play football near old buildings in the historical quarter of the Yemeni capital Sanaa**

**In December, national team players Ali Al Saudi and Abdullah Arif Abd Rabbo were killed...and former player Nasser Al Rimi died during a shelling**

watch eight different teams. It was a success and the large crowds demonstrated that there was a strong appetite for live football. Localised cup tournaments have also been taking place.

There is a football incentive to get back into action as soon as possible. The Yemeni league has been inactive for over six years but 2022 World Cup qualification, which stopped in November 2019 and has been put back and back, is set to finally resume in June. If the domestic-based players are able to get some regular competitive action, then it can only help.

Yemen have already drawn 2-2 with both Saudi Arabia and Singapore to show they can give anyone a game on their day, but they are now fourth in their group behind Uzbekistan, the Saudis and Singapore. Realistically they are out of the running to progress to the final round. There is still plenty to play for however as the road to Qatar is combined with the road to China 2023 and the Asian Cup.

This is a realistic target as Yemen qualified for the 2019 Asian Cup for the first time ever. It was a difficult group with Iraq, winners in 2007, and Iran, Asia's number one team for a number of years, and a much-improved Vietnam.

No points, no goals for and ten against suggest that it was not the best of times, but the real achievement was just getting there. It was a rare event that unified the country. The league may not be ready to restart just yet but when it does return, it will be a huge step.

Yet there is still a desire to get it done. It was heightened last year as the YFA organised *al-Batulat al-Tanshitiya*, the Recovery Championship, a two-week tournament that drew 35,000 fans to the city of Seyun, selected as it was in a relatively safe zone even if there was fighting nearby, to

**Coach...Sami Hasan Al Nash has had several spells in charge of Yemen's national team**

**Hope... Yemen will have their sights set on the 2023 Asian Cup in China**

Manchester United, while Chelsea beat Sheffield United 2-0. Elsewhere, Arsenal come back from 3-0 down to draw 3-3 at West Ham in the Premier League.
**SPAIN:** Leo Messi becomes Barca's record appearance-maker in the 6-1 thrashing of Real Sociedad.
**FRANCE:** PSG move top of Ligue 1 with a 4-2 victory at Lyon. Kylian Mbappe becomes the youngest star to hit 100 goals in the league.
**CHILE:** Universidad Catolica defeat Colo-Colo 4-2 to win the Chile Super Cup.
**SOUTH KOREA:** FC Seoul overcome rivals Suwon Samsung Bluewings 2-1 in the K-League.
**MOROCCO:** In the Casablanca derby, Wydad beat Raja 2-0 to move three points clear at the top.
**SCOTLAND:** Rangers stay on course to finish the league season unbeaten after a 1-1 draw at Celtic.
**SOUTH AFRICA:** In the Soweto derby, Kaizer Chiefs beat Orlando Pirates 1-0 to dent their title hopes.
**NEW ZEALAND:** After finishing top of the Premiership for the eighth year in a row, Auckland City lose 4-2 to Team Wellington in the grand final.

### Tuesday March 23

**SCOTLAND:** Highland League side Brora Rangers stun Championship side Hearts in the Scottish FA Cup.

### Wednesday March 24

**SERBIA:** Aleksandar Mitrovic goes level with Stjepan Bobek as Serbia's all-time top goalscorer, a record he surpasses three days later.
**EUROPE:** In the Euro U21s, Spain and Germany get their campaigns underway with 3-0 wins against Slovenia and Hungary respectively, while Italy and Netherlands draw 1-1 with the Czech Republic and Romania respectively.

### Thursday March 25

**EUROPE:** Switzerland and Denmark secure unlikely 1-0 wins in the Euro U21s, beating England and France respectively. Portugal beat Croatia 1-0 and Russia thump Iceland 4-1.

### Friday March 26

**SOUTH AMERICA:** Scheduled World Cup qualifiers between Chile and Paraguay and Colombia and Brazil are postponed due to coronavirus concerns.

# Internationals

## 2022 WORLD CUP QUALIFIERS

### EUROPE section

● *13 finals places available*

#### Group A

*Mar 24 - Turin*
**Portugal 1** (Medvedev 37 og)
**Azerbaijan 0**
**HT:** 1-0. **Ref:** Siebert (Ger)
**Portugal:** Lopes - Cancelo, Duarte, Dias, Mendes, Bernardo Silva (Oliveira 88), Moutinho (Fernandes 45), Neves (Palhinha 88), Neto (Rafa Silva 63), Andre Silva (Felix 75), Ronaldo.
**Azerbaijan:** Mahammadaliyev - Medvedev, Huseynov, Badalov, Krivotsyuk, Huseynov (Nuriev 45), Mustafayev (Ibrahimli 45), Mahmudov (Isaev 85), Salahli, Emreli (Alasgarov 85), Ghorbani (Seydaev 85).

*Mar 24 - Belgrade*
**Serbia 3** (Vlahovic 40, A. Mitrovic 68, 75)
**Republic of Ireland 2** (Browne 18, Collins 86)
**HT:** 1-1. **Ref:** Massa (Ita)
**Serbia:** Dmitrovic - Milenkovic, S. Mitrovic, Pavlovic, Gajic, Lukic, Racic (Maksimovic 63), Mladenovic (Kostic 45), Tadic (Gudelj 78), Vlahovic (Jovic 82), Djuricic (A. Mitrovic 63).
**Republic of Ireland:** Travers - Coleman, O'Shea, Clark (Brady 79), Doherty, Molumby (Hendrick 61), Cullen, Browne (Collins 79), Stevens, Robinson (McClean 79), Connolly (Long 67).

*Mar 27 - Belgrade*
**Serbia 2** (A. Mitrovic 46, Kostic 60)
**Portugal 2** (Jota 11, 36)
**HT:** 0-2. **Ref:** Makkelie (Ned)
**Serbia:** Dimitrovic - Milenkovic, S. Mitrovic, Pavlovic, Lazovic (Maksimovic 45), Milinkovic-Savic, Gudelj, Kostic (Ristic 72), Tadic (Djuricic 82), Vlahovic (Radonjic 45), A. Mitrovic (Jovic 88). *Sent off: Milenkovic 90+2.*
**Portugal:** Lopes - Cedric, Fonte, Dias, Cancelo (Mendes 72), Fernandes (Palhinha 90+1), Danilo, Oliveira (Sanches 73), Bernardo Silva, Ronaldo, Jota (Felix 85).

*Mar 27 - Dublin*
**Republic of Ireland 0**
**Luxembourg 1** (Rodrigues 85)
**HT:** 0-0. **Ref:** Jovic (Cro)
**Republic of Ireland:** Bazunu - Coleman, O'Shea, Clark (McClean 61), Doherty (Brady 45), Knight, Cullen (Molumby 88), Stevens, Browne, Collins (Parrott 88), Robinson (Long 73).
**Luxembourg:** Moris - Da Graca, Chanot, Mahmutovic, Jans, Pereira, V. Thill (Deville 79), O. Thill, Martins, Rodrigues, Sinani (Gerson 90+2).

#### Group B

*Mar 25 - Granada*
**Spain 1** (Morata 33)
**Greece 1** (Bakasetas 56 pen)
**HT:** 1-0. **Ref:** Guida (Ita)
**Spain:** Simon - Llorente, Garcia, Ramos (Martinez 45), Gaya, Rodri, Koke (Thiago 72), Canales (Gil 65), Torres (Oyarzabal 72), Olmo (Pedri 64), Morata.
**Greece:** Vlachodimos - Bakakis, Papadopoulos, Tzavellas, Tsimikas (Kyriakopoulos 80), Rodrigues, Limnios (Siopis 45), Bouchalakis, Mantalos (Tzolis 45), Masouras (Fortounis 65), Bakasetas (Giakoumakis 78).

*Mar 25 - Solna*
**Sweden 1** (Claesson 35)
**Georgia 0**
**HT:** 1-0. **Ref:** Bastien (Fra)
**Sweden:** Nordfeldt - Lustig (Krafth 84), Lindelof, Helander, Augustinsson, Kulusevski, Olsson (Ekdal 68, Svanberg 73), Larsson, Claesson (Forsberg 74), Isak, Ibrahimovic (Quaison 84).
**Georgia:** Loria - Chabradze, Kashia, Dvali, Giorbelidze, Kankava (Gvilia 60), Aburjania, Lobzhanidze (Beridze 78), Kvekveskiri (Shengelia 60), Kvaratskhelia (Kiteishvili 45), Kvilitaia (Mikautadze 84).

*Mar 28 - Tbilisi*
**Georgia 1** (Kvaratskhelia 34)
**Spain 2** (Torres 56, Olmo 90+2)
**HT:** 1-0. **Ref:** Petrescu (Rou)
**Georgia:** Loria - Kakabadze (Chabradze 79), Kashia, Dvali, Giorbelidze, Gvilia, Kankava, Lobzhanidze (Shengelia 70), Kiteishvili (Beridze 71), Kvaratskhelia (Kvekveskiri 79), Zivzivadze (Kvilitaia 62). *Sent off: Shengelia 90+4.*
**Spain:** Simon - Porro (M. Llorente 65), D. Llorente (Martinez 45), Garcia, Alba, Busquets (Oyarzabal 73), Ruiz (Thiago 55), Pedri, Torres, Gil (Olmo 45), Morata.

*Mar 28 - Pristina*
**Kosovo 0**
**Sweden 3** (Augustinsson 12, Isak 35, Larsson 70 pen)
**HT:** 0-2. **Ref:** Bognar (Hun)
**Kosovo:** Ujkani - Hadergjonaj, Vojvoda, Aliti, Kololli, Halimi (Voca 75), Kryeziu, Rashica (Kastrati 71), Celina, Zeneli (Berisha 83), Muriqi. *Sent off: Berisha 90+2.*
**Sweden:** Nordfeldt - Lustig, Lindelof, Helander, Augustinsson (Bengtsson 83), Olsson (Svanberg 90), Claesson (Kulusevski 83), Larsson, Forsberg, Isak (Quaison 68), Ibrahimovic (Berg 67).

#### Group C

*Mar 25 - Sofia*
**Bulgaria 1** (Despodov 46)
**Switzerland 3** (Embolo 7, Seferovic 10, Zuber 13)
**HT:** 0-3. **Ref:** Dabanovic (Mne)
**Bulgaria:** P. Iliev - Dimov, Bozhikov, Zanev, Popov, Kostadinov, Malinov (Chochev 71), Gusmao (Tsvetanov 73), Despodov (Delev 48), Yomov (I. Iliev 70), D. Iliev (A. Iliev 45).
**Switzerland:** Sommer - Elvedi, Akanji, Rodriguez, Mbabu, Freuler (Sow 86), Xhaka, Zuber (Zakaria 75), Shaqiri (Vargas 75), Seferovic (Gavranovic 86), Embolo (Mehmedi 90).

*Mar 25 - Parma*
**Italy 2** (Berardi 14, Immobile 38)
**Northern Ireland 0**
**HT:** 2-0. **Ref:** Palabiyik (Tur)
**Italy:** Donnarumma - Florenzi, Bonucci, Chiellini, Emerson (Spinazzola 75), Pellegrini (Barella 64), Locatelli (Pessina 84), Verratti, Berardi (Chiesa 75), Immobile, Insigne (Grifo 84).
**Northern Ireland:** Peacock-Farrell - Smith, Cathcart, J. Evans, McNair, Dallas, C. Evans (Saville 45), Davis, McCann (Thompson 78), Whyte (Lavery 64), Magennis (Lafferty 78).

*Mar 28 - Sofia*
**Bulgaria 0**
**Italy 2** (Belotti 43 pen, Locatelli 82)
**HT:** 0-1. **Ref:** Vincic (Svn)
**Bulgaria:** P. Iliev - Antov, Dimov, Bozhikov, Gusmao (Karagaren 45), Kostadinov (Malinov 62), Vitanov (Raynov 88), Chochev, Tsvetanov, Delev (A. Iliev 78), Galabinov.
**Italy:** Donnarumma - Florenzo (Di Lorenzo 68), Bonucci, Acerbi, Spinazzola, Verratti (Pessina 88), Barella, Sensi (Locatelli 68), Insigne, Belotti (Immobile 75), Chiesa (Bernardeschi 76).

*Mar 28 - St. Gallen*
**Switzerland 1** (Shaqiri 2)
**Lithuania 0**
**HT:** 1-0. **Ref:** Gestranius (Fin)
**Switzerland:** Sommer - Elvedi, Akanji, Rodriguez, Widmer (Fernandes 65), Freuler (Zakaria 66), Xhaka, Vargas (Zuber 80), Shaqiri (Mehmedi 80), Embolo (Gavranovic 66), Seferovic.
**Lithuania:** Svedkauskas - Mikoliunas, Gaspuitis, Beneta, Vaitkunas, Simkus, Novikovas, Dapkus, Slivka (Eliosius 75), Lasickas (Laukzemis 58), Chernykh (Petravicius 81).

#### Group D

*Mar 24 - Helsinki*
**Finland 2** (Pukki 58, 77)
**Bosnia & Herz. 2** (Pjanic 55, Stevanovic 84)
**HT:** 0-0. **Ref:** Sidiropoulos (Gre)
**Finland:** Joronen - Alho, Toivio, Arajuuri, Raitala, Hamalainen, Valakari (Schuller 45), Kamara, Kauko (Sparv 82), Lod (Pohjanpalo 77), Pukki.
**Bosnia & Herzegovina:** Sehic - Todorovic, Hadzikadunic, Sanicanin, Civic, Stevanovic (Kolasinac 89), Cimirot (Demirovic 82), Pjanic, Krunic, Gojak (Duljevic 64), Dzeko.

*Mar 24 - Saint-Denis*
**France 1** (Griezmann 19)
**Ukraine 1** (Kimpembe 57 og)
**HT:** 1-0. **Ref:** Stieler (Ger)
**France:** Lloris - Pavard, Varane, Kimpembe, Hernandez, Kante, Rabiot, Coman (Dembele 64), Griezmann, Mbappe (Martial 77), Giroud (Pogba 63).
**Ukraine:** Bushchan - Karavaev, Zabarnyi, Kryvtsov, Matvienko, Mykolenko, Shaparenko (Zubkov 86), Sydorchuk (Kovalenko 79), Zinchenko, Malinovskiy, Yaremchuk (Moraes 73).

*Mar 28 - Astana*
**Kazakhstan 0**
**France 2** (Dembele 19, Maliy 44 og)
**HT:** 0-2. **Ref:** Kulbakov (Blr)
**Kazakhstan:** Mokin - Bystrov, Erlanov, Maliy, Alip, Valiullin (Samorodov 83), Tagybergen, Muzhikov (Vorogovskiy 65), Vassiljev (Astanov 89), Nurgaliev (Karimov 83), Fedin (Tungyshbayev 65).
**France:** Lloris - Dubois, Zouma, Lenglet, Digne, Pogba (Rabiot 59), Ndombele (Sissoko 82), Dembele (Coman 90), Griezmann (Ben Yedder 59), Lemar, Martial (Mbappe 59).

*Mar 28 - Kiev*
**Ukraine 1** (Moraes 80)
**Finland 1** (Pukki 89 pen)
**HT:** 0-0. **Ref:** Kovacs (Rou)
**Ukraine:** Bushchan - Zabarnyi, Matvienko, Mykolenko, Karavaev, Zinchenko, Makarenko (Kovalenko 78), Sobol, Malinovskiy, Zubkov (Marlos 58), Yaremchuk (Moraes 67). *Sent off: Mykolenko 88.*
**Finland:** Joronen - Granlund (Alho 17), Toivio, Arajuuri, O'Shaughnessy, Raitala (Hamalainen 76), Kamara, Schuller (Taylor 76), Kauko (Pohjanpalo 68), Lod, Pukki.

#### Group E

*Mar 24 - Lublin*
**Estonia 2** (Sappinen 12, Anier 86)
**Czech Republic 6** (Schick 18, Barak 27, Soucek 32, 43, 48, Jankto 56)
**HT:** 1-4. **Ref:** Papapetrou (Gre)
**Estonia:** Aksalu - Antonov (Puri 75), Purg, Paskotsi, Lilander, Alliku (Kirss 73), Poom, Vastsuk (Frolov 82), Oigus, Vassiljev (Anier 73), Sappinen (Roosnupp 88).
**Czech Republic:** Pavlenka - Kaderabek, Kudela, Celustka (Zima 85), Boril, Provod (Vydra 65), Darida, Soucek, Jankto (Masopust 65), Barak (Pekhart 65), Schick (Holes 79).

*Mar 24 - Leuven*
**Belgium 3** (De Bruyne 22, T. Hazard 28, Lukaku 73 pen)
**Wales 1** (Wilson 10)
**HT:** 2-1. **Ref:** Cakir (Tur)
**Belgium:** Courtois - Alderweireld, Vermaelen (Denayer 45), Vertonghen, Meunier, Tielemans, Dendoncker, T. Hazard (Castagne 84), De Bruyne, Mertens (Trossard 90+3), Lukaku.
**Wales:** Ward - Mepham, Rodon, Lawrence, C. Roberts, Allen (Morrell 8), Ampadu, N. Williams, Bale (Moore 84), Wilson (T. Roberts 67), James.

*Mar 27 - Minsk*
**Belarus 4** (Lisakovich 44 pen, 83, Yendysh 64, Savitskiy 81)
**Estonia 2** (Anier 31, 55)
**HT:** 1-1. **Ref:** Hennessy (Irl)
**Belarus:** Gutor - Bordachev, Naumov, Zolotov, Yuzepchuk, Stasevich, Kendysh (Klimovich 87), Yablonskiy (Signevich 58), Ebong (Savitskiy 58), Laptev (Kislyak 46), Lisakovich (Bakhar 85).
**Estonia:** Igonen - Kuusk, Purg, Lilander, Paskotsi (Kirss 87), Vassiljev, Poom, Anier, Alliku (Oigus 62), Vastsuk, Sappinen (Puri 79).

*Mar 27 - Prague*
**Czech Republic 1** (Provod 50)
**Belgium 1** (Lukaku 60)
**HT:** 0-0. **Ref:** Collum (Sco)
**Czech Republic:** Vaclik - Coufal, Kudela, Celustka, Boril, Holes, Provod (Pekhart 90+4), Barak (Pavelka 78), Soucek, Jankto (Masopust 61), Krmencik (Vydra 78).
**Belgium:** Courtois - Alderweireld, Denayer, Vertonghen, Castagne, Tielemans, Dendoncker, Chadli (Foket 56), De Bruyne, Mertens (Trossard 56), Lukaku.

#### Group F

*Mar 25 - Tel Aviv*
**Israel 0**
**Denmark 2** (Braithwaite 13, Wind 67)
**HT:** 0-1. **Ref:** Pawson (Eng)
**Israel:** Marciano - Dasa (Kandil 85), Elhamed, Tibi, Abu Hanna (Lavi 45), Menachem (Haziza 85), Natcho (Golasa 68), Peretz, Solomon, Dabbur (Weissman 61), Zahavi.
**Denmark:** Schmeichel - Wass, Kjaer, Christensen, Maehle (Larsen 86), Hojbjerg, Delaney (Norgaard 88), Poulsen (Olsen 77), Eriksen, Braithwaite, Wind (Andersen 77).

*Mar 25 - Chisinau*
**Moldova 1** (Nicolaescu 9)
**Faroe Islands 1** (Olsen 83)
**HT:** 1-0. **Ref:** Griffith (Wal)
**Moldova:** Namasco - Posmac, Epureanu, Armas, Jardan, Rata (Cojocari 86), Carp (Caimacov 72), Ionita, Reabciuk, Nicolaescu, Damascan (Postolachi 73).
**Faroe Islands:** Nielsen - Rolantsson, Faero (Vatnsdal 40), Nattestad, Davidsen, Vatnhamar (Jonsson 78), Hansson (Bjartalid 69), Vatnhamar, H. Olsen, A. Olsen, Edmundsson (E. Olsen 78).

*Mar 25 - Glasgow*
**Scotland 2** (Hanley 71, McGinn 85)
**Austria 2** (Kalajdzic 55, 80)
**HT:** 0-0. **Ref:** Del Cerro Grande (Esp)
**Scotland:** Marshall - Hendry, Hanley, Tierney, O'Donnell, McTominay, McGinn, Robertson, Christie (McLean 88), Armstrong (Adams 66), Dykes (McGregor 78).
**Austria:** A. Schlager - Lainer, Dragovic, Lienhart, Alaba, Baumgartner, Grillitsch, Ilsanker, X. Schlager, Kalajdzic, Grbic (Schaub 68).

*Mar 28 - Herning*
**Denmark 8** (Dolberg 19 pen, 48, Damsgaard 21, 29, Larsen 35, Jensen 38, Skov 81, Ingvartsen 89)
**Moldova 0**
**HT:** 5-0. **Ref:** Aghayev (Aze)
**Denmark:** Schmeichel - Stryger Larsen (Kjaer 78), Andersen, Vestergaard, Boilesen, Schone (Eriksen 77), Norgaard (Jonsson 65), Jensen (Ingvartsen 78), Skov Olsen (Skov 45), Dolberg, Damsgaard.
**Moldova:** Namasco - Arhirii (Bolohan 45), Epureanu, Armas, Reabciuk, Carp (Cojocari 54), Antoniuc (Jardan 45), Rata, Ionita, Platica (Iosipoi 54), Nicolaescu (Damascan 75).

*Mar 28 - Vienna*
**Austria 3** (Dragovic 30, Baumgartner 37, Kalajdzic 44)
**Faroe Islands 1** (Nattestad 19)
**HT:** 3-1. **Ref:** Monzul (Ukr)
**Austria:** A. Schlager - Lainer (Trimmel 76), Trauner, Dragovic, Ulmer, Schaub (Demir 85), Grillitsch, Alaba (Schopf 64), Baumgartner (Onisiwo 76), Kalajdzic (Gregoritsch 63), Sabitzer.
**Faroe Islands:** Nielsen - Rolantsson, Vatnsdal (Andreasen 59), Nattestad, Davidsen, Vatnhamar (Bjartalid 59), Hansson (A. Olsen 81), Vatnhamar, H. Olsen, Edmundsson (Knudsen 74), E. Olsen (Johannesen 58).

*Mar 28 - Tel Aviv*
**Israel 1** (Peretz 44)
**Scotland 1** (Fraser 56)
**HT:** 1-0. **Ref:** Aytekin (Ger)
**Israel:** Marciano - Elhamed, Tibi, Arad, Dasa, Natcho (Lavi 63), Peretz, Menachem (Kayal 79), Solomon, Weismann (Dabbur 74), Zahavi.
**Scotland:** Marshall - Hendry (Christie 45), Hanley, Tierney, O'Donnell, McTominay, McGregor, Robertson, McGinn (McLean 74), Fraser (Armstrong 86), Adams (Dykes 75).

#### Group G

*Mar 24 - Istanbul*
**Turkey 4** (Yilmaz 15, 34 pen, 81, Calhanoglu 46)
**Netherlands 2** (Klaassen 75, De Jong 76)
**HT:** 2-0. **Ref:** Oliver (Eng)
**Turkey:** Cakir - Celik, Kabak, Soyuncu, Meras, Yokuslu, Yazici (Erkin 64), Tufan (Antalyali 64), Calhanoglu (Unal 78), Karaman (Ayhan 79), Yilmaz (Turuc 90).
**Netherlands:** Krul - Tete (Dumfries 69), De Ligt, Blind (Gravenberch 82), Wijndal (Van Aanholt 82), De Roon (L. De Jong 62), F. De Jong, Wijnaldum, Berghuis, Malen (Klaassen 69), Depay.

*Mar 24 - Gibraltar*
**Gibraltar 0**
**Norway 3** (Sorloth 43, Thorstvedt 45, Svensson 57)
**HT:** 0-2. **Ref:** Strukan (Cro)
**Gibraltar:** Coleing - Sergeant, Chipolina, Wiseman, Mouelhi, Mascarenhas-Olivero, Walker, Annesley (Barnett 72), Ronan (Bosio 67), Casciaro (Valarino 78), De Barr.
**Norway:** Jarstein - Svensson (Linnes 62), Strandberg, Lode, Meling, Midtsjo (Nguen 62), Thorstvedt, Elyounoussi (Hauge 45), Odegaard (Berg 45), Haaland (King 62), Sorloth.

*Mar 24 - Riga*
**Latvia 1** (J. Ikaunieks 40)
**Montenegro 2** (Jovetic 41, 83)
**HT:** 1-1. **Ref:** Durieux (Lux)
**Latvia:** Steinbors - Savalnieks, Cernomordijs, Oss, Jurkovskis, Kamess (Jaunzems 71), Zjuzins (Karklins 71), Tobers, Ciganiks (D. Ikaunieks 81), J. Ikaunieks, Uldrikis (Krollis 81).
**Montenegro:** Mijatovic - Marusic, Savic, Vujacic, Radunovic, Scekic, Kosovic, Ivanovic (Jovovic 75), Jovetic (Beqiraj 87), Haksabanovic (Boljevic 90+1), Djurdjevic.

*Mar 27 - Podgorica*
**Montenegro 4** (Beciraj 25, Simic 43, Tomasevic 52, Jovetic 80)
**Gibraltar 1** (Styche 30 pen)
**HT:** 2-1. **Ref:** Schuttengruber (Aut)
**Montenegro:** Mijatovic - Tomasevic, Radunovic, Simic, Vukcevic, Kosovic (Lagator 60), Bakic (Vulaj 26), Jovovic, Haksabanovic (Boljevic 60), Beciraj (Jovetic 46), Durdevic (Martinovic 77).
**Gibraltar:** Goldwin - Barnett, Jolley, Valarino (Wiseman 81), Moulds, Bosio (Hernandez 51), Pons (Walker 66), Sergeant, Santos, Hassan (Coombes 46), Styche (Borge 65).

*Mar 27 - Malaga*
**Norway 0**
**Turkey 3** (Tufan 4, 58, Soyuncu 28)
**HT:** 0-2. **Ref:** Hernandez (Esp)
**Norway:** Jarstein – Gregersen, Meling, Ajer, Ryerson (Svensson 68), Midtsjo (Thorstvedt 67), Elyounoussi (King 67), Berg, Odegaard, Sorloth, Haaland (Thorsby 83. *Sent off: Midtsjo 79.*
**Turkey:** Cakir - Ayhan, Soyuncu, Meras, Muldur, Yokuslu, Calhanoglu (Antalyali 69), Tufan (Kabak 86), Yazici (Erkin 69), Yilmaz (Akbunar 86), Karaman (Unal 72).

*Mar 27 - Amsterdam*
**Netherlands 2** (Berghuis 32, De Jong 69)
**Latvia 0**
**HT:** 1-0. **Ref:** Frappart (Fra)
**Netherlands:** Krul - Dumfries, De Ligt, Blind, Wijndal, Wijnaldum (Van De Beek 79), F. De Jong, Berghuis (Stengs 84), Klaassen (Gravenberch 79), Depay (Bergwijn 89), L. De Jong (Babel 79).
**Latvia:** Ozols - Fjodorovs, Cernomordijs, Tarasovs, Jurkovskis, Zjuzins (Karklins 45), Tobers, Kamess (Savalnieks 79), J. Ikaunieks (Krollis 88), Ciganiks (Solovjovs 85), Uldrikis (Gutkovskis 45).

### Group H

*Mar 24 - Strovolos*
**Cyprus 0**
**Slovakia 0**
**HT:** 0-0. **Ref:** Stavrev (Mkd)
**Cyprus:** Demetriou - Kousoulos, Soteriou, Laifis, Antoniou, Artymatas, Kastanos (Kyriakou 66), Ioannou, Papoulis (Loizou 72), Sotiriou (Ilia 90+2), Pittas.
**Slovakia:** Dubravka - Pekarik, Skriniar, Hancko, Hubocan, Kucka, Hrosovsky, Bero (Schranz 78), Duda (Sterlec 84), Bozenik (Duris 61), Rusnak (Gregus 60).

*Mar 24 - Ta'Qali*
**Malta 1** (Mbong 56)
**Russia 3** (Dzyuba 23, Fernandes 35, Sobolev 89)
**HT:** 0-2. **Ref:** Kjaersgaard-Andersen (Den)
**Malta:** Bonello - Shaw, Agius (Nwoko 88), Borg, Mbong, Kristensen (Pisani 74), Guillaumier, Camenzuli (Corbalan 86), Teuma, Degabriele (Mbong 45), Montebello (Satariano 45).
**Russia:** Shunin - Fernandes, Semenov, Dzhikiya, Karavaev, Akhmetov, Fomin (Al. Miranchuk 57), Kuzyaev (Mostovoy 78), Golovin, Ionov (Zhemaletdinov 57), Dzyuba (Sobolev 83).

*Mar 24 - Ljubljana*
**Slovenia 1** (Lovric 15)
**Croatia 0**
**HT:** 1-0. **Ref:** Mateu Lahoz (Esp)
**Slovenia:** Oblak - Stojanovic, Blazic, Mevlja, Balkovec, Bijol (Vetrih 69), Kurtic, Lovric (Bajric 87), Ilicic (Skubic 87), Sporar (Kramer 69), Bohar (Crnigoj 64).
**Croatia:** Livakovic - Vrsaljko, Lovren, Vida, Barisic (Orsic 45), Modric, Brozovic, Kovacic (Pasalic 82), Vlasic (Budimir 69), Perisic, Kramaric (Brekalo 65).

*Mar 27 - Sochi*
**Russia 2** (Dzyuba 26, 35)
**Slovenia 1** (Ilicic 36)
**HT:** 2-1. **Ref:** Di Bello (Ita)
**Russia:** Shunin - Fernandes, Dzhikiya, Semenov, Kudryashov, Zhirkov (Karavaev 68), Ozdoev, Kuzyaev, Golovin (Al. Miranchuk 49), Dzyuba (Zabolotny 86), Zhemaletdinov (Mukhin 86).
**Slovenia:** Oblak - Mevlja, Blazic, Balkovec, Stojanovic (Skubic 61), Kurtic, Lovric (Zahovic 86), Bijol (Vetrih 62), Zajc (Bohar 75), Ilicic, Sporar (Vuckic 75).

*Mar 27 - Rijeka*
**Croatia 1** (Pasalic 40)
**Cyprus 0**
**HT:** 1-0. **Ref:** Tohver (Est)
**Croatia:** Livakovic - Vrsaljko (Juranovic 46), Lovren, Caleta-Car, Barisic, Modric, Brozovic, Pasalic (Orsic 66), Perisic (Kovacic 77), Brekalo (Vlasic 66), Budimir (Kramaric 57).
**Cyprus:** Demetriou - Laifis (Andreou 82), Kyriakou, Soteriou, Ioannou, Kousoulos, Psaltis, Artymatas (Kastanos 67), Tzionis (Papoulis 67), Ilia (Sotiriou 46), Pittas.

*Mar 27 - Trnava*
**Slovakia 2** (Strelec 49, Skriniar 53)
**Malta 2** (Gambin 16, Satariano 19)
**HT:** 0-2. **Ref:** Lechner (Aut)
**Slovakia:** Kuciak - Skriniar, Valjent, Koscelnik, Hancko (Holubek 39), Kucka (Strelec 46), Gregus, Mak, Hrosovsky (Schranz 82), Duris (Bozenik 46), Suslov (Rusnak 72).
**Malta:** Bonello - Borg, Pepe, Camenzuli, Teuma (Kristensen 90+1), Gambin (Grech 68), Guillaumier, Mbong, Shaw, Satariano (Pisani 79), Mbong (Nwoko 68).

### Group I

*Mar 25 - Andorra la Vella*
**Andorra 0**
**Albania 1** (Lenjani 41)
**HT:** 0-1. **Ref:** Chinkov (Bul)
**Andorra:** Gomes - Rubio (Alavedra 56), Llovera, Vales, M. San Nicolas, Cervos, A. Martinez, (A. Sanchez 70), Rebes (Moreno 79), Vieira (Pujol 79), Alaez, Fernandez (C. Martinez 70).
**Albania:** Berisha - Ismajli, Kumbulla, Djimsiti, Hysaj, Bare, Gjasula, Memushaj (Laci 62), Lenjani (Roshi 81), Cikalleshi (Broja 81), Manaj (Uzuni 62).

*Mar 25 - London*
**England 5** (Ward-Prowse 14, Calvert-Lewin 21, 53, Sterling 31, Watkins 83)
**San Marino 0**
**HT:** 3-0. **Ref:** Levnikov (Rus)
**England:** Pope - James (Trippier 45), Stones (Mings 45), Coady, Chilwell, Ward-Prowse, Phillips, Mount (Bellingham 45), Lingard, Calvert-Lewin (Watkins 63), Sterling (Foden 45).
**San Marino:** Benedettini - M. Battistini, Brolli, Rossi, Grandoni (Ceccaroli 55), Hirsch (Mularoni 55), Golinucci (M. Battistini 71), Lunadei (Giardi 79), Palazzi, Berardi (D'Addario 79), Nanni.

*Mar 25 - Budapest*
**Hungary 3** (Sallai 6, Ad. Szalai 52, Orban 78)
**Poland 3** (Piatek 60, Jozwiak 61, Lewandowski 82)
**HT:** 1-0. **Ref:** Brych (Ger)
**Hungary:** Gulacsi - Fiola, Orban, At. Szalai, Lovrencsics (Nego 66), Kleinheisler, Nagy, Kalmar (Siger 81), Hangya (Lang 66), Ad. Szalai, Sallai (Varga 72). *Sent off: Fiola 90+4.*
**Poland:** Szczesny - Bereszynski, Helik (Glik 58), Bednarek, Szymanski (Jozwiak 59), Moder (Piatek 59), Krychowiak, Reca (Rybus 79), Zielinski, Lewandowski, Milik (Grosicki 84).

*Mar 28 - Tirana*
**Albania 0**
**England 2** (Kane 38, Mount 63)
**HT:** 0-1. **Ref:** Grinfeld (Isr)
**Albania:** Berisha - Hysaj, Ismajli, Djimsiti, Veseli, Laci (Ramadani 89), Bare (Memushaj 71), Memolla (Gjasula 59), Cikalleshi (Manaj 59), Broja (Lenjani 59), Uzuni.
**England:** Pope - Walker, Stones, Maguire, Shaw, Mount, Phillips (Ward-Prowse 71), Rice, Sterling, Kane, Foden (Lingard 81).

*Mar 28 - Warsaw*
**Poland 3** (Lewandowski 30, 55, Swiderski 88)
**Andorra 0**
**HT:** 1-0. **Ref:** Lambrechts (Bel)
**Poland:** Szczesny - Bereszynski (Dawidowicz 60), Piatkowski, Glik, Rybus (Grosicki 60), Krychowiak, Jozwiak, Zielinski (Kozlowski 73), Lewandowski (Swiderski 63), Milik (Placheta 60), Piatek.
**Andorra:** Iker - M. San Nicolas, C. Garcia, E. Garcia, Alavedra, M. Garcia (Cervos 58), Rebes (Vieira 87), Vales, C. Martinez (A. Martinez 74), Sanchez (L. San Nicolas 87), Pujol (Alaez 58).

*Mar 28 - Serravalle*
**San Marino 0**
**Hungary 3** (Ad. Szalai 13 pen, Sallai 71, Nikolics 88 pen)
**HT:** 0-1. **Ref:** Walsh (Sco)
**San Marino:** Benedettini - Battistini, Fabbri, Brolli, Rossi, Palazzi, Lunadei (Zonzini 53), Nanni (Hirsch 80), Golinucci, Mularoni, Berardi (Bernardi 80).
**Hungary:** Dibusz - Botka, Orban, At. Szalai, Nego (Kalmar 45), Cseri (Nikolics 45), Siger, Gazdag (Kleinheisler 63), K. Varga (R. Varga 72), A. Szalai (Geresi 85), Sallai.

### Group J

*Mar 25 - Duisburg*
**Germany 3** (Goretzka 3, Havertz 7, Gundogan 56)
**Iceland 0**
**HT:** 2-0. **Ref:** Jovanovic (Srb)
**Germany:** Neuer - Klostermann, Ginter, Rudiger, Can, Goretzka (Neuhaus 71), Kimmich, Gundogan, Havertz (Musiala 79), Gnabry (Younes 86), Sane (Werner 79).
**Iceland:** Halldorsson - Sampsted, Arnason, Ingason, Magnusson, Gunnarsson, Traustason (Sigurdsson 71), Palsson (Skulason 89), Sigurjonsson (A. Gudmundsson 40), Bjarnason, Bodvarsson (Sigthorsson 89).

*Mar 25 - Vaduz*
**Liechtenstein 0**
**Armenia 1** (Frommelt 83 og)
**HT:** 0-0. **Ref:** Weinberger (Aut)
**Liechtenstein:** Buchel - Yildiz (Brandle 65), Malin (Grunenfelder 45), Kaufmann, Hofer, Goppel, Meier (Frommelt 65), Hasler, Sele, N. Frick (Beck 76), Y. Frick.
**Armenia:** Yurchenko - Hambardzumyan, Haroyan, Calisir, Hovhannisyan, Barseghyan (Bichakhchyan 90+2), Udo, Grigoryan (Karapetian 45), Bayramyan (Babayan 75), Adamyan, Briasco (Miranyan 64).

*Mar 25 - Bucharest*
**Romania 3** (Tanase 28, Mihaila 50, Hagi 85)
**North Macedonia 2** (Ademi 82, Trajkovski 83)
**HT:** 1-0. **Ref:** Verissimo (Por)
**Romania:** Nita - Popescu, Chiriches, Burca, Bancu, Marin, Stanciu (Bicfalvi 76), Man (Maxim 76), Tanase (Hagi 76), Coman (Mihaila 14), Keseru (Puscas 63).
**North Macedonia:** Dimitrievski - Bejtulai, Musliu, Ristevski (Ibraimi 88), Nikolov (Ademi 54), Ristovski, Bardhi, Elmas, Alioski, Nestorovski (Stojanovski 54), Pandev (Trajkovski 78).

*Mar 28 - Yerevan*
**Armenia 2** (Barseghyan 53, Bayramyan 74)
**Iceland 0**
**HT:** 0-0. **Ref:** Jorgji (Alb)
**Armenia:** Yurchenko - Hambardzumyan, Haroyan, Voskanyan, Hovhannisyan, Barseghyan, Udo (Muradyan 81), Grigoryan, Hakobyan (Bayramyan 56), Adamyan (Shaghoyan 81), Briasco (Karapetian 64).
**Iceland:** Halldorsson - Saevarsson, Arnason, Ingason, Skulason, Gunnarsson, J. Gudmundsson (Traustason 77), Sigurdsson (Sigthorsson 56), Bjarnason (Palsson 84), A. Gudmundsson, Bodvarsson (Fridjonsson 77).

*Mar 28 - Skopje*
**North Macedonia 5** (Bardhi 7, Trajkovski 51, 54, Elmas 62, Nestorovski 82 pen)
**Liechtenstein 0**
**HT:** 1-0. **Ref:** Balakin (Ukr)
**North Macedonia:** Dimitrievski - Ristovski (Bejtulai 58), Musliu, Ristevski, Alioski (Askovski 66), Radeski, Spirovski, Bardhi (Nikolov 58), Elmas, Pandev (Nestorovski 58), Trajkovski (Hasani 66).
**Liechtenstein:** Buchel - Brandle, Wolfinger, Malin, Hofer, Goppel (Marxer 78), Meier (Ospelt 45), Frommelt (Vogt 66), Wolfinger (Marxer 66), Hasler (Sele 42), Frick.

*Mar 28 - Bucharest*
**Romania 0**
**Germany 1** (Gnabry 16)
**HT:** 0-1. **Ref:** Turpin (Fra)
**Romania:** Nita - Popescu, Chiriches, Tosco, Paulino (Burca 45), Stanciu, Marin, Hagi (Maxim 83), Tanase (Cicaldau 83), Mihaila (Man 66), Keseru (Puscas 66).
**Germany:** Neuer - Klostermann, Ginter, Rudiger, Can, Goretzka, Kimmich, Gundogan, Havertz (Werner 77), Gnabry (Neuhaus 90+2), Sane (Younes 90+4).

## CONCACAF section

● *3.5 finals places available*

### Group A

*Mar 25 - Willemstad*
**Antigua & Barbuda 2** (Kirwan 23, Bishop 45)
**Montserrat 2** (Taylor 7 pen, 26)
**HT:** 2-2. **Ref:** Matamoros (Hon)

*Mar 26 - San Salvador*
**El Salvador 2** (Mayen 23, Rugamas 46)
**Grenada 0**
**HT:** 1-0. **Ref:** Ward (Skn)

*Mar 28 - Christiansted*
**US Virgin Islands 0**
**Antigua & Barbuda 3** (Byers 26, Griffith 34 pen, 42)
**HT:** 0-3. **Ref:** Richards (Skn)

*Mar 29 - Willemstad*
**Montserrat 1** (Taylor 89)
**El Salvador 1** (Rugamas 4)
**HT:** 0-1. **Ref:** De Leca (Aru)

### Group B

*Mar 24 - Paramaribo*
**Suriname 3** (Pinas 22, Donk 38 pen, Vlijter 76)
**Cayman Islands 0**
**HT:** 2-0. **Ref:** Perez (Mex)

*Mar 26 - Orlando*
**Canada 5** (Larin 19, 27, 69, Laryea 53, Corbeanu 81)
**Bermuda 1** (Crichlow 63)
**HT:** 2-0. **Ref:** Villarreal (USA)

*Mar 28 - Bradenton*
**Aruba 0**
**Suriname 6** (Hasselbaink 20, 38, 55, Donk 29, Jozefzoon 70, Alberg 74)
**HT:** 0-3. **Ref:** Elfath (USA)

*Mar 29 - Bradenton*
**Cayman Islands 0**
**Canada 11** (Sturing 6, Larin 13, Wotherspoon 25, Davies 27 pen, 73, Kaye 32, 63, Johnston 44, Cavallini 68, 74, 76)
**HT:** 0-6. **Ref:** Unkel (USA)

### Group C

*Mar 25 - Guatemala City*
**Guatemala 1** (Martinez 60)
**Cuba 0**
**HT:** 0-0. **Ref:** Pineda (Crc)

*Mar 26 - Willemstad*
**Curacao 5** (Bacuna 1, 36, Van den Hurk 17, Antonia 44, Hooi 87)
**St. Vincent & Grenadines 0**
**HT:** 4-0. **Ref:** De Leca (Aru)

*Mar 28 - Willemstad*
**British Virgin Islands 0**
**Guatemala 3** (Lom 21, Hernandez 44, Betancourth 81)
**HT:** 0-2. **Ref:** Moncada (Hon)

*Mar 28 - Guatemala City*
**Cuba 1** (Hernandez 27)
**Curacao 2** (Bacuna 11, Benschop 44)
**HT:** 1-2. **Ref:** Martinez Miranda (Slv)

### Group D

*Mar 25 - Santo Domingo*
**Dominican Republic 1** (Nunez 52)
**Dominica 0**
**HT:** 0-0. **Ref:** Anderson (Pur)

*Mar 26 - Santo Domingo*
**Panama 1** (Catuy 82)
**Barbados 0**
**HT:** 0-0. **Ref:** Saghafi (USA)

*Mar 27 - Fort Lauderdale*
**Anguilla 0**
**Dominican Republic 6** (Romero 22 pen, 27, Lorenzo 25, 46, Peralta 66, Espinal 76)
**HT:** 0-3. **Ref:** Vazquez (USA)

*Mar 28 - Santo Domingo*
**Dominica 1** (Laville 82)
**Panama 2** (Thomas 28 og, Fajardo 85)
**HT:** 0-1. **Ref:** Ortiz Nava (Mex)

### Group E

*Mar 25 - Port-au-Prince*
**Haiti 2** (Ade 50, Seance 80)
**Belize 0**
**HT:** 0-0. **Ref:** Lopez (Gua)

*Mar 28 - San Cristobal*
**Turks & Caicos Islands 0**
**Nicaragua 7** (Barrera 3, 59, Smith 8, 45+2, Fletes 46, Forbes 78, Moldskred 87)
**HT:** 0-3. **Ref:** Anderson (Pur)

### Group F

*Mar 25 - San Cristobal*
**St. Kitts & Nevis 1** (Nelson 42)
**Puerto Rico 0**
**HT:** 1-0. **Ref:** Solano (Dom)

*Mar 26 - San Cristobal*
**Trinidad & Tobago 3** (Garcia 7, Bateau 15, Telfer 44)
**Guyana 0**
**HT:** 3-0. **Ref:** Ortiz (Mex)

*Mar 28 - Nassau*
**Bahamas 0**
**St. Kitts & Nevis 4** (Freeman 25, 65, Rogers 51, Sterling-James 82)
**HT:** 0-1. **Ref:** Celima (Hai)

*Mar 28 - Mayaguez*
**Puerto Rico 1** (Rivera 72)
**Trinidad & Tobago 1** (Jones 54)
**HT:** 0-0. **Ref:** Escobedo (Mex)

## 2021 AFCON QUALIFICATION

### Group A

*Mar 24 - Conakry*
**Guinea 1** (Soumah 75)
**Mali 0**
**HT:** 0-0. **Ref:** Essrayri (Tun)

### Group B

*Mar 24 - Kitende*
**Uganda 0**
**Burkina Faso 0**
**HT:** 0-0. **Ref:** Gassama (Gam)

*Mar 24 - Omdurman*
**South Sudan 0**
**Malawi 1** (Mbulu 47)
**HT:** 0-0. **Ref:** Ogwayo (Ken)

### Group C

*Mar 24 - Sao Tome*
**Sao Tome e Principe 0**
**Sudan 2** (Abdelrahman 27, Malik 55)
**HT:** 0-1. **Ref:** Pwadutakam (Nga)

*Mar 25 -Johannesburg*
**South Africa 1** (Tau 51)
**Ghana 1** (Kudus 49)
**HT:** 0-0. **Ref:** Weyesa (Eth)

### Group D

*Mar 25 - Franceville*
**Gabon 3** (Boupendza 44, Bouanga 72, Aubameyang 86)
**DR Congo 0**
**HT:** 1-0. **Ref:** Sikazwe (Zam)

*Mar 25 - Bakau*
**Gambia 1** (Ceesay 62)
**Angola 0**
**HT:** 0-0. **Ref:** Ligali (Ben)

### Group E

*Mar 26 - Bujumbura*
**Burundi 2** (Ntibazonkiza 59, Nduwarugira 80)
**Central African Republic 2** (Mafouta 40, 53)
**HT:** 0-1. **Ref:** Huraywidah (Lby)

*Mar 27 - Nouakchott*
**Mauritania 0**
**Morocco 0**
**HT:** 0-0. **Ref:** Bondo (Bot)

### Group F

*Mar 24 - Kigali*
**Rwanda 1** (Byiringiro 70)
**Mozambique 0**
**HT:** 0-0. **Ref:** Sy (Sen)

*Mar 26 - Praia*
**Cape Verde Islands 3** (Kuca 25, Bagnack 59 og, Mendes 69)
**Cameroon 1** (Kunde 14)
**HT:** 1-1. **Ref:** Ndiaye (Sen)

### Group G

*Mar 25 - Moroni*
**Comoros 0**
**Togo 0**
**HT:** 0-0. **Ref:** Ssali (Uga)

*Mar 25 - Nairobi*
**Kenya 1** (Abdallah 65)
**Egypt 1** (Afsha 2)
**HT:** 0-1. **Ref:** Ndzandzeka (Rsa)

### Group H

*Mar 25 - Francistown*
**Botswana 0**
**Zimbabwe 1** (Chikwende 14)
**HT:** 0-1. **Ref:** Gatogato (Bdi)

*Mar 25 - Lusaka*
**Zambia 3** (Daka 34 pen, 80 pen, Chama 52)
**Algeria 3** (Ghezzal 19, Slimani 25, 55)
**HT:** 1-2. **Ref:** Adelaid (Com)

### Group I

*Mar 26 - Manzini*
**Eswatini 1** (Badenhorst 21)
**Guinea-Bissau 3** (Djalo 15, Semedo 25, Pele 50)
**HT:** 1-2. **Ref:** Ishimwe (Rwa)

*Mar 26 - Brazzaville*
**Congo 0**
**Senegal 0**
**HT:** 0-0. **Ref:** El Banna (Egy)

### Group J

*Mar 25 - Benghazi*
**Libya 2** (Ellafi 21, 54)
**Tunisia 5** (Skhiri 39, Jaziri 48, 90+3, Drager 51, Slimane 84)
**HT:** 1-1. **Ref:** Gueye (Sen)

*Mar 25 - Malabo*
**Equatorial Guinea 1** (Nsue 90)
**Tanzania 0**
**HT:** 0-0. **Ref:** Camille (Sey)

### Group K

*Mar 24 - Bahir Dar*
**Ethiopia 4** (Gebremichael 19, Kebede 34, Nassir 41, Bekele 86)
**Madagascar 0**
**HT:** 3-0. **Ref:** Alioum (Cmr)

*Mar 26 - Niamey*
**Niger 0**
**Ivory Coast 3** (Aurier 25, Gradel 34, Kanon 60)
**HT:** 0-2. **Ref:** Dahane (Mtn)

### Group L

*Mar 27 - Maseru*
**Lesotho 0**
**Sierra Leone 0**
**HT:** 0-0. **Ref:** Rakotojaona (Mad)

*Mar 27 - Porto-Novo*
**Benin 0**
**Nigeria 1** (Onuachu 90+3)
**HT:** 0-0. **Ref:** Jiyed (Mar)

## FRIENDLIES

*Mar 24 - Zhodzina*
**Belarus 1** (Savitskiy 22)
**Honduras 1** (Lopez 45)
**HT:** 1-1. **Ref:** Matyunin (Rus)

*Mar 24 - Debrecen*
**Qatar 1** (Muntari 12)
**Luxembourg 0**
**HT:** 1-0. **Ref:** Djordjic (Srb)

*Mar 24 - Pristina*
**Kosovo 4** (Zeneli 27, 71, Muriqi 63, Halimi 79)
**Lithuania 0**
**HT:** 1-0. **Ref:** Jorgji (Alb)

*Mar 24 - Dubai*
**Oman 1** (K. Singh 43 og)
**India 1** (M. Singh)
**HT:** 1-0. **Ref:** Al Ali (UAE)

*Mar 25 - Wiener Neustadt*
**United States 4** (Dest 34, Aaronson 52, Lletget 83, 90)
**Jamaica 1** (Lowe 70)
**HT:** 1-0. **Ref:** Ciochirca (Aut)

*Mar 25 - Yokohama*
**Japan 3** (Yamane 16, Kamada 27, Endo 83)
**South Korea 0**
**HT:** 2-0. **Ref:** Rowan (Ind)

*Mar 25 - Riyadh*
**Saudi Arabia 1** (Al Amri 70)
**Kuwait 0**
**HT:** 0-0. **Ref:** Bunafoor (Bhr)

*Mar 27 - Rancagua*
**Chile 2** (Jimenez 12, Meneses 20)
**Bolivia 1** (Martins 18)
**HT:** 2-1. **Ref:** Benitez (Par)

*Mar 27 - Zenica*
**Bosnia & Herzegovina 0**
**Costa Rica 0**
**HT:** 0-0. **Ref:** Kajtazovic (Svn)

*Mar 27 - Debrecen*
**Qatar 2** (Al Heidos 55 pen, 58)
**Azerbaijan 1** (Seydayev 16 pen)
**HT:** 0-1. **Ref:** Kruzliak (Svk)

*Mar 27 - Cardiff*
**Wales 1** (Moore 11)
**Mexico 0**
**HT:** 1-0. **Ref:** McNabb (Nir)

*Mar 28 - Thessaloniki*
**Greece 2** (Pavlidis 14, 59)
**Honduras 1** (Rodriguez 41)
**HT:** 1-1. **Ref:** Schnyder (Sui)

*Mar 28 - Belfast*
**Northern Ireland 1** (McGinn 88)
**United States 2** (Reyna 30, Pulisic 59 pen)
**HT:** 0-1. **Ref:** Jenkins (Wal)

# Club football
# EUROPE

## CHAMPIONS LEAGUE 2020-21

### Round of 16 - Leg 2

*Mar 9 - Dortmund*
**Borussia Dortmund 2 (5)** (Haaland 35, 54 pen)
**Sevilla 2 (4)** (En-Nesyri 68 pen, 90+6)
**HT:** 1-0. **Ref:** Cakir (Tur)

*Mar 9 - Torino*
**Juventus 3 (4)** (Chiesa 49, 63, Rabiot 117)
**Porto 2 (4)*** (Oliveira 19 pen, 115)
**HT:** 0-1. **Ref:** Kuipers (Ned)
**Porto win on away goals after extra-time*

*Mar 10 - Budapest*
**Liverpool 2 (4)** (Salah 70, Mane 74)
**RB Leipzig 0 (0)**
**HT:** 0-0. **Ref:** Turpin (Fra)

*Mar 10 - Paris*
**PSG 1 (5)** (Mbappe 30 pen)
**Barcelona 1 (2)** (Messi 37)
**HT:** 1-1. **Ref:** Taylor (Eng)

*Mar 16 - Budapest*
**Man. City 2 (4)** (De Bruyne 12, Gundogan 18)
**Borussia Monchengladbach 0 (0)**
**HT:** 2-0. **Ref:** Karasev (Rus)

*Mar 16 - Madrid*
**Real Madrid 3 (4)** (Benzema 34, Ramos 60 pen, Asensio 84)
**Atalanta 1 (1)** (Muriel 83)
**HT:** 1-0. **Ref:** Makkelie (Ned)

*Mar 17 - London*
**Chelsea 2 (3)** (Ziyech 34, Emerson 90+4)
**Atletico Madrid 0 (0)**
**HT:** 1-0. **Ref:** Orsato (Ita)

*Mar 17 - Munich*
**Bayern Munich 2 (6)** (Lewandowski 33 pen, Choupo-Moting 73)
**Lazio 1 (2)** (Parolo 82)
**HT:** 1-0. **Ref:** Kovacs (Rou)

### Quarter-Finals

*Apr 6/14* – **Manchester City v Borussia Dortmund, Real Madrid v Liverpool**

*Apr 7/13* – **Bayern Munich v Paris Saint-Germain, Porto v Chelsea**

## EUROPA LEAGUE 2020-21

### Round of 16 - Leg 1

*Mar 11 - Amsterdam*
**Ajax 3** (Klaassen 62, Tadic 82, Brobbey 90+2)
**Young Boys 0**
**HT:** 0-0. **Ref:** Guida (Ita)

*Mar 11 - Kiev*
**Dynamo Kiev 0**
**Villarreal 2** (Torres 30, Albiol 52)
**HT:** 0-1. **Ref:** Oliver (Eng)

*Mar 11 - Manchester*
**Manchester United 1** (Diallo 50)
**Milan 1** (Kjaer 90+2)
**HT:** 0-0. **Ref:** Vincic (Svn)

*Mar 11 - Prague*
**Slavia Prague 1** (Stanciu 7)
**Rangers 1** (Helander 36)
**HT:** 1-1. **Ref:** Hategan (Bel)

*Mar 11 - Granada*
**Granada 2** (Molina 26, Soldado 75)
**Molde 0**
**HT:** 1-0. **Ref:** Raczkowski (Pol)

*Mar 11 - Piraeus*
**Olympiakos 1** (El Arabi 58)
**Arsenal 3** (Odegaard 34, Gabriel 79, Elneny 85)
**HT:** 0-1. **Ref:** Siebert (Ger)

*Mar 11 - Rome*
**Roma 3** (Pellegrini 23, El Shaarawy 73, Mancini 77)
**Shakhtar Donetsk 0**
**HT:** 1-0. **Ref:** Soares Dias (Por)

*Mar 11 - London*
**Tottenham Hotspur 2** (Kane 25, 70)
**Dinamo Zagreb 0**
**HT:** 1-0. **Ref:** Gozubuyuk (Ned)

### Round of 16 - Leg 2

*Mar 18 - London*
**Arsenal 0 (3)**
**Olympiakos 1 (2)** (El Arabi 51)
**HT:** 0-0. **Ref:** Del Cerro (Esp)

*Mar 18 - Zagreb*
**Dinamo Zagreb 3 (3)** (Orsic 62, 82, 106)
**Tottenham Hotspur 0 (2)**
**HT:** 0-0. **Ref:** Massa (Ita)
*After extra-time*

*Mar 18 - Budapest*
**Molde 2 (2)** (Vallejo 29 og, Hestad 90 pen)
**Granada 1 (3)** (Soldado 72)
**HT:** 1-0. **Ref:** Jovanovic (Srb)

*Mar 18 - Kiev*
**Shakhtar Donetsk 1 (1)** (Moraes 59)
**Roma 2 (5)** (Mayoral 48, 72)
**HT:** 0-0. **Ref:** Mateu (Esp)

*Mar 18 - Milan*
**Milan 0 (1)**
**Manchester United 1 (2)** (Pogba 48)
**HT:** 0-0. **Ref:** Brych (Ger)

*Mar 18 - Glasgow*
**Rangers 0 (1)**
**Slavia Prague 2 (3)** (Olayinka 14, Stanciu 74)
**HT:** 0-1. **Ref:** Grinfeld (Isr)

*Mar 18 - Villarreal*
**Villarreal 2 (4)** (Moreno 13, 36)
**Dynamo Kiev 0 (0)**
**HT:** 2-0. **Ref:** Ekberg (Swe)

*Mar 18 - Bern*
**Young Boys 0 (0)**
**Ajax 2 (5)** (Neres 20, Tadic 49 pen)
**HT:** 0-1. **Ref:** Madden (Sco)

### Quarter-Finals

*Apr 8/15* – **Granada v Manchester United, Arsenal v Slavia Prague, Ajax v Roma, Dinamo Zagreb v Villarreal**

## FA CUP 2020-21

### Quarter-Finals

*Mar 20 - Bournemouth*
**Bournemouth 0**
**Southampton 3** (Djenepo 37, Redmond 45+1, 59)
**HT:** 0-2. **Ref:** Atkinson (Eng)

*Mar 20 - Liverpool*
**Everton 0**
**Manchester City 2** (Gundogan 84, De Bruyne 90)
**HT:** 0-0. **Ref:** Oliver (Eng)

*Mar 21 - London*
**Chelsea 2** (Norwood 24 og, Ziyech 90+2)
**Sheffield United 0**
**HT:** 1-0. **Ref:** Madley (Eng)

*Mar 21 - Leicester*
**Leicester City 3** (Iheanacho 24, 78, Tielemans 52)
**Manchester United 1** (Greenwood 38)
**HT:** 1-1. **Ref:** Marriner (Eng)

### Semi-Finals

*Apr 17* – **Chelsea v Manchester City**
*Apr 18* – **Leicester City v Southampton**

# SOUTH AMERICA

## 2021 COPA LIBERTADORES

### Second Round - Leg 1

*Mar 9 - Sao Paulo*
**Santos 2** (Vinicius 50, Kaiky 69)
**Deportivo Lara 1** (Anzola 52)
**HT:** 0-0. **Ref:** Matonte (Uru)

*Mar 9 - Montevideo*
**Wanderers 1** (Rolon 55)
**Bolivar 0**
**HT:** 0-0. **Ref:** Garay (Chi)

*Mar 10 - Santiago*
**Union Espanola 1** (Caicedo 65 og)
**Independiente del Valle 0**
**HT:** 0-0. **Ref:** Sampaio (Bra)

*Mar 10 - Quito*
**Universidad Catolica 0**
**Libertad 1** (Bogarin 38)
**HT:** 0-1. **Ref:** Araujo (Bra)

*Mar 11 - Rio Grande do Sul*
**Gremio 6** (Braz 4, Ferreira 28, Souza 33 pen, 41, 86, Azevedo 79)
**Ayacucho 1** (Quina 73)
**HT:** 4-0. **Ref:** Aragon (Ecu)

*Mar 11 - Caracas*
**Caracas 1** (Akinyoola 35)
**Junior 2** (Borja 69, Ditta 90+1)
**HT:** 1-0. **Ref:** Tobar (Chi)

*Mar 11 - Santiago*
**Universidad de Chile 1** (Henriquez 76)
**San Lorenzo 1** (Di Santo 78)
**HT:** 0-0. **Ref:** Claus (Bra)

*Mar 11 - Asuncion*
**Guarani 0**
**Atletico Nacional 2** (Barrera 22, Rovira 90+8)
**HT:** 0-1. **Ref:** Valenzuela (Ven)

### Second Round - Leg 2

*Mar 16 - Caracas*
**Deportivo Lara 1 (2)** (Anzola 62)
**Santos 1 (3)** (Soteldo 37)
**HT:** 0-1. **Ref:** Carrillo (Per)

*Mar 16 - La Paz*
**Bolivar 5 (5)** (Ramos 4, 52, Miranda 40, Macaluso 57 og, Abrego 90+4)
**Wanderers 0 (1)**
**HT:** 2-0. **Ref:** Guerrero (Ecu)

*Mar 17 - Quito*
**Independiente del Valle 6 (6)** (Vite 3, Montenegro 15, 39, 90+9, Faravelli 30 pen, 57)
**Union Espanola 2 (3)** (Mendez 56, Rubio 61)
**HT:** 4-0. **Ref:** Roldan (Col)

*Mar 17 - Quito*
**Ayacucho 1 (2)** (Sosa 40)
**Gremio 2 (8)** (Ferreira 41, Ricardinho 87)
**HT:** 1-1. **Ref:** Ostojich (Uru)

*Mar 17 - Asuncion*
**Libertad 2 (3)** (Ferreira 32, 64)
**Universidad Catolica 2 (2)** (Chala 61, Tevez 82 pen)
**HT:** 1-0. **Ref:** Rapallini (Arg)

*Mar 18 - Barranquilla*
**Junior 3 (5)** (Borja 41, Gutierrez 75, Pajoy 90+1)
**Caracas 1 (2)** (Akinyoola 86 pen)
**HT:** 1-0. **Ref:** Vigliano (Arg)

*Mar 18 - Buenos Aires*
**San Lorenzo 2 (3)** (Di Santo 13, Romero 59)
**Universidad de Chile 0 (1)**
**HT:** 1-0. **Ref:** Gonzalez (Uru)

*Mar 19 - Medellin*
**Atl Nacional 3 (5)** (Andrade 24, 52, Barrera 39)
**Guarani 0 (0)**
**HT:** 2-0. **Ref:** Pitana (Arg)

# AFRICA

## CAF CHAMPIONS LEAGUE 2020-21

### Group A

*Feb 12 - Kinshasa*
**Vita Club 0**
**Simba 1** (Mugalu 61 pen)
**HT:** 0-0. **Ref:** Gassama (Gam)

*Feb 16 - Cairo*
**Al Ahly 3** (Kafsha 57, Kahraba 63, Bwalya 71)
**Al Merrikh 0**
**HT:** 0-0. **Ref:** Sikazwe (Zam)

*Feb 23 - Dar es Salaam*
**Simba 1** (Miquissone 31)
**Al Ahly 0**
**HT:** 1-0. **Ref:** Alioum (Cmr)

*Feb 23 - Omdurman*
**Al Merrikh 1** (Saadeldin 8)
**Vita Club 4** (Mukokiani 28, 83, Shabani 37 pen, Masasi 68)
**HT:** 1-2. **Ref:** Ghorbal (Alg)

*Mar 6 - Omdurman*
**Al Merrikh 0**
**Simba 0**
**HT:** 0-0. **Ref:** Camille (Sey)

*Mar 6 - Cairo*
**Al Ahly 2** (Sherif 69, Mohsen 71)
**Vita Club 2** (Lilepo 41, Tulenge 80 pen)
**HT:** 0-1. **Ref:** Jayed (Mar)

*Mar 16 - Kinshasa*
**Vita Club 0**
**Al Ahly 3** (Sherif 6, Magdi Kafsha 19, Mohamed 78)
**HT:** 0-2. **Ref:** Bondo (Bot)

*Mar 16 - Dar es Salaam*
**Simba 3** (Miquissone 18, Husseini 39, Mugalu 50)
**Al Merrikh 0**
**HT:** 2-0. **Ref:** Gomes (Rsa)

### Group B

*Feb 13 - Lubumbashi*
**TP Mazembe 0**
**Belouizdad 0**
**HT:** 0-0. **Ref:** Otogo-Castane (Gab)

*Feb 13 - Pretoria*
**Mamelodi Sundowns 2** (Lebusa 10, Erasmus 90)
**Al Hilal Omdurman 0**
**HT:** 1-0. **Ref:** Grisha (Egy)

*Feb 24 - Omdurman*
**Al Hilal Omdurman 0**
**TP Mazembe 0**
**HT:** 0-0. **Ref:** Guezzaz (Mar)

*Feb 28 - Dar es Salaam*
**Belouizdad 1** (Sayoud 44)
**Mamelodi Sundowns 5** (Zwane 5 pen, 55, Shalulile 48, Maboe 75, Erasmus 89)
**HT:** 1-1. **Ref:** Traore (Mli)

*Mar 5 - Algiers*
**Belouizdad 1** (Koukpo 43)
**Al Hilal Omdurman 1** (Abdel Raman 3)
**HT:** 1-1. **Ref:** Ndiaye (Sen)

*Mar 6 - Lubumbashi*
**TP Mazembe 1** (Mputu 82)
**Mamelodi Sundowns 2** (Shalulile 67 pen, Lakay 90)
**HT:** 0-0. **Ref:** Alioum (Cmr)

*Mar 16 - Omdurman*
**Al Hilal Omdurman 0**
**Belouizdad 0**
**HT:** 0-0. **Ref:** Maarouf Eid Mansour (Egy)

*Mar 16 - Pretoria*
**Mamelodi Sundowns 1** (Maboe 28)
**TP Mazembe 0**
**HT:** 1-0. **Ref:** Srairi (Tun)

### Group C

*Feb 13 - Conakry*
**Horoya 2** (Nikiema 36 pen, Barry 85)
**Petro de Luanda 0**
**HT:** 1-0. **Ref:** Damane (Mtn)

*Feb 23 - Luanda*
**Petro de Luanda 0**
**Wydad Casablanca 1** (El Kaabi 71)
**HT:** 0-0. **Ref:** Ndala (Cgo)

*Feb 23 - Johannesburg*
**Kaizer Chiefs 0**
**Horoya 0**
**HT:** 0-0. **Ref:** Bondo (Bot)

*Feb 28 - Ouagadougou*
**Wydad Casablanca 4** (Ounajem 7, El Kaabi 44, Msuva 86, Jabrane 90+2 pen)
**Kaizer Chiefs 0**
**HT:** 2-0. **Ref:** Selmi (Tun)

*Mar 6 - Johannesburg*
**Kaizer Chiefs 2** (Mathoho 30, Mashiane 79)
**Petro de Luanda 0**
**HT:** 1-0. **Ref:** Bamlak (Eth)

*Mar 6 - Casablanca*
**Wydad Casablanca 2** (El Kaabi 19, Msuva 89)
**Horoya 0**
**HT:** 1-0. **Ref:** Abid Charef (Alg)

*Mar 16 - Luanda*
**Petro de Luanda 0**
**Kaizer Chiefs 0**
**HT:** 0-0. **Ref:** Ndabihawenimana (Bdi)

*Mar 16 - Conakry*
**Horoya 0**
**Wydad Casablanca 0**
**HT:** 0-0. **Ref:** Laryea Nii Ayi (Gha)

### Group D

*Feb 12 - Cairo*
**Zamalek 0**
**MC Alger 0**
**HT:** 0-0. **Ref:** Bamlak (Eth)

*Feb 13 - Rades*
**Esperance 2** (Khenissi 45 pen, Khalid 73)
**Teungueth 1** (Sillah 33)
**HT:** 1-1. **Ref:** Waweru (Ken)

*Feb 23 - Thies*
**Teungueth 0**
**Zamalek 0**
**HT:** 0-0. **Ref:** Laryea Nii Ayi (Gha)

*Feb 23 - Algiers*
**MC Alger 1** (Bensaha 27)
**Esperance 1** (Benguit 60)
**HT:** 1-0. **Ref:** Jayed (Mar)

Mar 6 - Thies
**Teungueth 0**
**MC Alger 1** (Belkheir 14)
**HT:** 0-1. **Ref:** Damane (Mtn)

*Mar 6 - Rades*
**Esperance 3** (Togui 26, Ben Romdhane 45 pen, 53)
**Zamalek 1** (Ahmed Fattoh 39)
**HT:** 2-1. **Ref:** Sikazwe (Zam)

*Mar 16 - Algiers*
**MC Alger 1** (Benaldjia 25)
**Teungueth 0**
**HT:** 1-0. **Ref:** Traore (Mli)

*Mar 16 - Cairo*
**Zamalek 0**
**Esperance 1** (Elhouni 73)
**HT:** 0-0. **Ref:** Ndala (Cod)

# ASIA

## INDIA

### Indian Super League 2020-21

| | P | W | D | L | F | A | Pts |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Mumbai City | 20 | 12 | 4 | 4 | 37 | 18 | 40 |
| ATK Mohun Bagan | 20 | 12 | 4 | 4 | 28 | 15 | 40 |
| NorthEast United | 20 | 8 | 9 | 3 | 31 | 25 | 33 |
| Goa | 20 | 7 | 10 | 3 | 31 | 23 | 31 |
| Hyderabad | 20 | 6 | 11 | 3 | 27 | 19 | 29 |
| Jamshedpur | 20 | 7 | 6 | 7 | 21 | 22 | 27 |
| Bengaluru | 20 | 5 | 7 | 8 | 26 | 28 | 22 |
| Chennaiyin | 20 | 3 | 11 | 6 | 17 | 23 | 20 |
| East Bengal | 20 | 3 | 8 | 9 | 22 | 33 | 17 |
| Kerala Blasters | 20 | 3 | 8 | 9 | 23 | 36 | 17 |
| Odisha | 20 | 2 | 6 | 12 | 25 | 44 | 12 |

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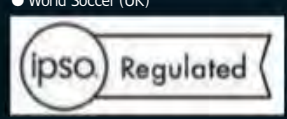

Stunning...a general view of the stadium during the 2017 Confederations Cup

# KRESTOVSKY STADIUM

**Location:** Saint Petersburg, Russia
**Team:** Zenit Saint Petersburg
**Built:** 2017
**Capacity:** 68,134

Japanese architecture firm Kisho Kurokawa won the contract to design Saint Petersburg's new stadium back in 2007. A decade later, at the eye-watering estimated cost of over $1 billion, the Krestovsky Stadium opened and hosted the final of the 2017 Confederations Cup.

Drawing inspiration from the Oita Stadium, the Japanese ground devised by Kurokawa for the 2002 World Cup, the stadium resembles a giant spaceship, settled on the edge of the Gulf of Finland. Russia's second-largest stadium is topped by a transparent retractable dome, which provides eco-friendly benefits such as solar power and a rainwater recycling system.

Seven matches featured at the Krestovsky Stadium during the 2018 World Cup, including Russia's 3-1 win against Egypt in Group A, France's semi-final victory over Belgium and England's third-place play-off defeat.

As Russia's scheduled venue for this summer's European Championship, three group matches and a quarter-final will be played at the stadium during the pan-European event.

Originally selected to host the final of the 2020-21 Champions League, the coronavirus pandemic delayed Saint Petersburg from welcoming UEFA's showpiece event until next year.

Spaceship...an outside view of the Krestovsky Stadium

Passion...the late Diego Maradona celebrates Argentina scoring against Nigeria at the 2018 World Cup

Champions...Zenit celebrate winning the Russian Premier League title in 2019

## GREATEST GAMES

### 2017 July 2 Chile 0-1 Germany

The Krestovsky Stadium's first headline assignment was the 2017 Confederations Cup final. A dreamlike closing ceremony preceded the final, paying homage to Russia's history. Copa America holders Chile were led by Alexis Sanchez and Arturo Vidal, but reigning world champions Germany took the spoils when Timo Werner pounced on a defensive error and squared to Lars Stindl to tap home.

### 2018 July 10 France 1-0 Belgium

World Cup 2018's first semi-final pitted two of Europe's powerhouses against each other. The star-studded line-ups converged on Saint Petersburg, with the likes of Kylian Mbappe and Paul Pogba battling Eden Hazard and Kevin De Bruyne for a spot in the final. Although Belgium had the advantage in possession; the tie was eventually decided by Samuel Umtiti's pinpoint header early in the second half.

### 2019 May 12 Zenit Saint Petersburg 3-1 CSKA Moscow

Zenit ended their four-year Russian Premier League drought at their new home in May 2019. After going behind to CSKA in the first half, courtesy of Ivan Oblyakov's delightful first-time strike, Sebastian Driussi's goals either side of Emiliano Rigoni's rifled effort secured Zenit's sixth Russian title. It was their first championship since 2015, and the win sparked scenes of euphoria across the city.

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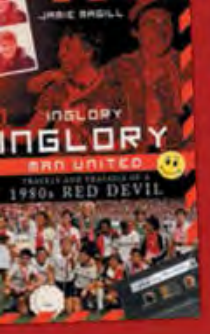
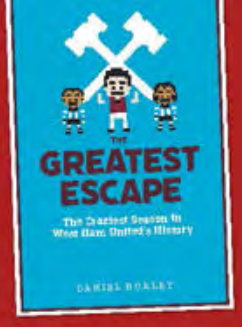
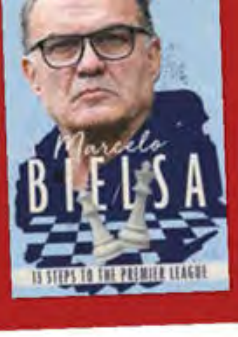
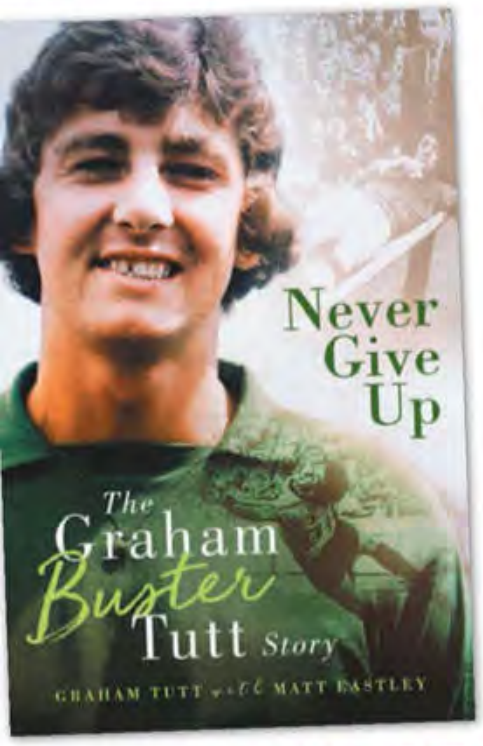
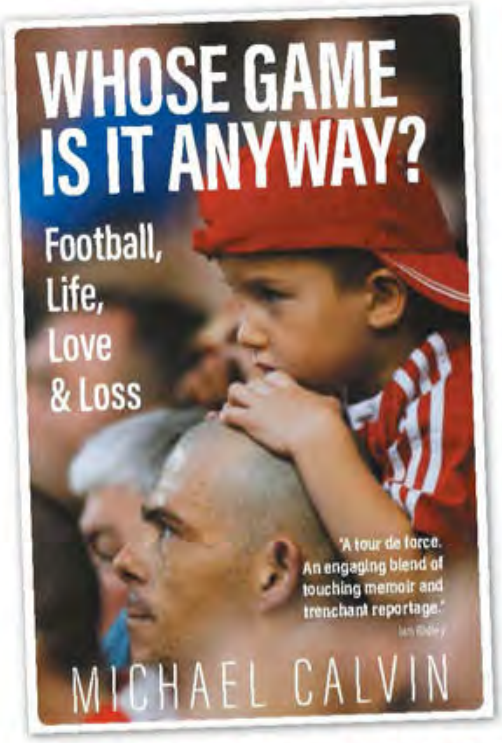
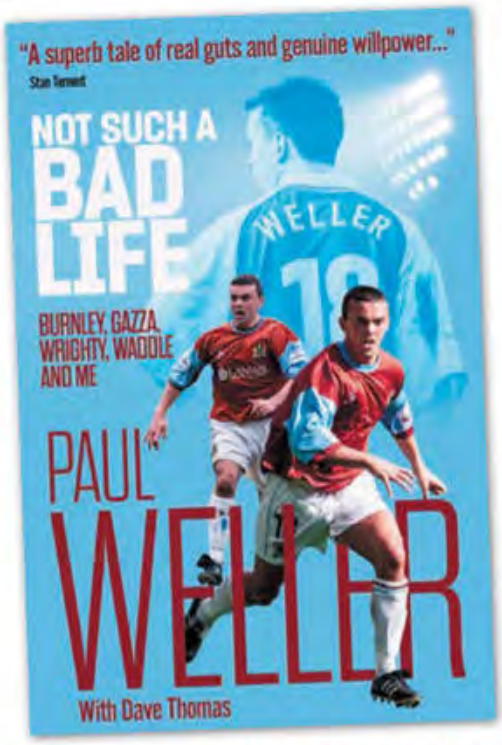


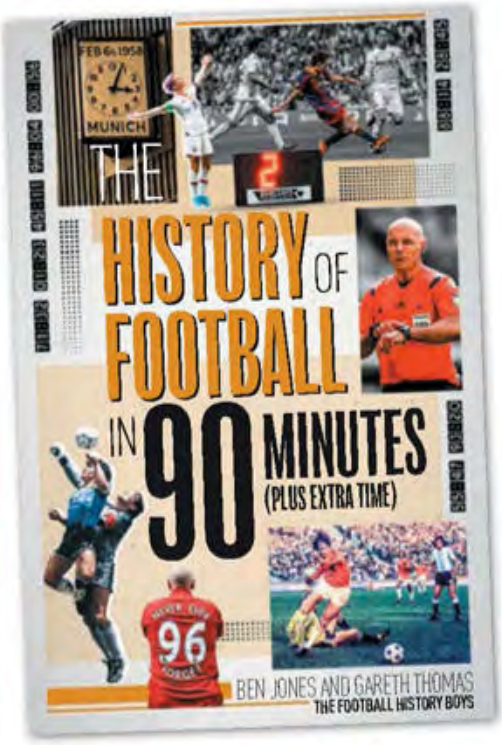




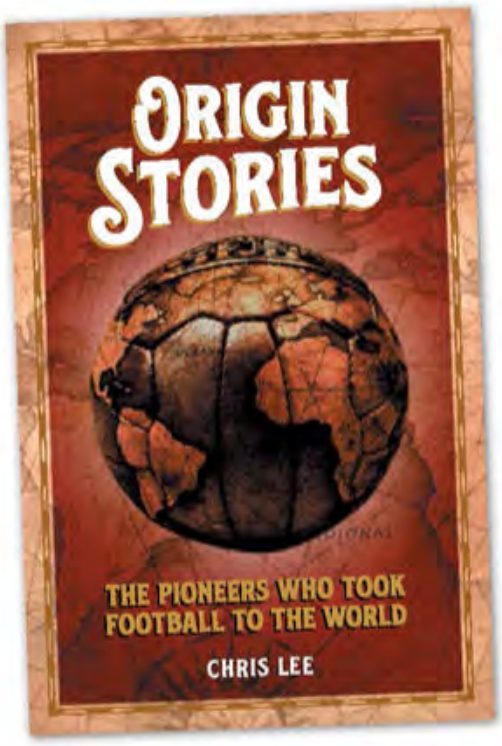


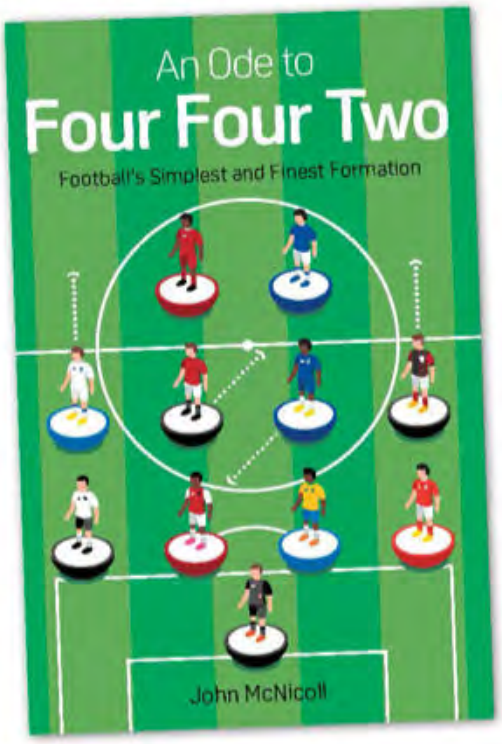


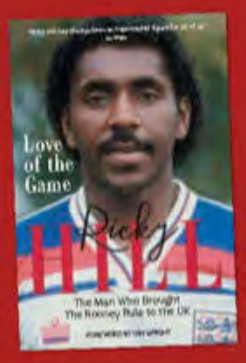


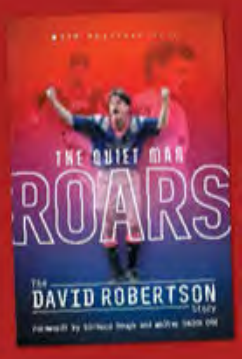



# EIGHT GREAT NEW SOCCER BOOKS OUT THIS APRIL









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